THE EPIC OF HADES

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THE EPIC OF HADES

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THE EPIC OF HADES

IN THREE BOOKS

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SONGS OF TWO WORLDS"

Sir Lewis Morris

"DIFFICILE EST PROPRIE COMMUNIA DICERE"

43634

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1877

"The three [illegible] of Poetry, simplicity of language, simplicity of subject, and simplicity of invention."—*The Welsh Triads.*

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TO

RICHARD MONCKTON MILNES,

LORD HOUGHTON,

THIS POEM IS DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

00043634

ERRATA AND CORRECTIONS IN BOOK II.

Page 22, line 13, *for* "At the last, with a long kiss" *read* "Last, torn from my endless kiss."

,, 28, line 1, *for* "fades and vanishes into . . . ." *read* "fade and are deceased, lost in . . . ."

,, 28, line 12, *delete* "soft and."

,, 46, line 9, *for* "knew" *read* "felt."

,, 50, line 9, *for* "heard" *read* "knew."

,, 64, line 16, *for* "and who can" *read* "content to."

,, 72, line 9, *for* "has" *read* "hast."

,, 77, line 2, *for* "wrong" *read* "ill."

,, 104, line 1, *for* "was" *read* "were."

,, 119, line 10, *for* "born" *read* "bred."

PREFACE TO BOOKS I. AND III.

THE issue of the present volume carries out the design for the completion of the poem which the writer has always entertained. The former volume will now take its place as Book II. of the complete work, for which purpose the necessary cancel-pages are included in the present issue.

The critical objections to the title of the poem, already very strong, seem to the writer to gain so much additional force from its present expansion that it may probably be renamed in future. Nothing, however, could now be done with this view.

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BOOK I.

TARTARUS.

THE EPIC OF HADES.

In February, when the dawn was slow,
And winds lay still, I gazed upon the fields
Which stretched before me lifeless, and the stream
Which laboured in the distance to the sea,
Sullen and cold. No force of fancy took
My thought to bloomy June, when all the land
Was deep in crested grass, and through the dew
The landrail brushed, and the lush banks were set
With strawberries, and the hot noise of bees

Lulled the bright flowers. Rather I seemed to move
Thro' that weird land, Hellenic fancy feigned,
Beyond the fabled river and the bark
Of Charon; and forthwith on every side
Rose the thin throng of ghosts.

First thro' the gloom
Of a dark grove I strayed—a sluggish wood,
Where scarce the faint fires of the setting stars,
Or some cold gleam of half-discovered dawn,
Might pierce the darkling pines. A twilight drear
Brooded o'er all the depths, and filled the dank
And sunken hollows of the rocks with shapes
Of terror,—beckoning hands and noiseless feet
Flitting from shade to shade, wide eyes that stared
With horror, and dumb mouths which seemed to cry,
Yet cried not. An ineffable despair
Was over them and that dark world and took
The gazer captive, and a mingled pang

Of grief and anger, grown to fierce revolt
And hatred of the Invisible Force which holds
The issue of men's lives and binds us fast
Within the net of Fate, as the fisher takes
The little quivering sea-things from the sea
And flings them panting down to die on the shore,
Then spreads his net for more. And then again
I felt myself and these, as those who lie
Within the strong grasp of Unchanging Law,
Which binds them round with hands unseen, and chains
Which do support the feeble life which else
Were spent on barren space; and thus I came
To look with less of horror, more of thought,
And bore to see the sight of pain that yet
Should grow to healing, when the concrete stain
Of life and act were purged, and the cleansed soul,
Renewed by the slow wear and waste of time,
Soared after æons of days.

They seemed alone,
Those prisoners, thro' all time. Each soul shut fast
In its own jail of woe, apart, alone,
For evermore alone; no thought of kin,
Or kindly human glance, or fellowship
Of suffering or of sin, made light the load
Of solitary pain. Ay, though they walked
Together, or were prisoned in one cell
With the partners of their wrong, or with strange souls
Which the same Furies tore, they knew them not,
But suffered still alone; as in that shape
Of hell fools build on earth, where hopeless sin
Rots slow in solitude, nor sees the face
Of men, nor hears the sound of speech, nor feels
The touch of human hand, but broods a ghost,
Hating the bare blank cell—the other self,
Which brought it thither—hating man and God,
And all that is or has been.

A great fear
And pity froze my blood, who seemed to see
A half-remembered form.
An Eastern King
It was who lay in pain. He wore a crown
Upon his painful brow, and his white robe
Was jewelled with fair gems of price, the signs
Of pomp and honour and all luxury,
Which might prevent desire. But as I looked
There came a hunger in the gloating eyes,

A quenchless thirst upon the parching lips,
And such unsatisfied strainings in the hands
Stretched idly forth on what I could not see,
Some fatal food of fancy; that I knew
The undying worm of sense, which frets and gnaws
The unsatisfied stained soul.

Seeing me, he said:

"What? And art thou too damned as I? Dost know
This thirst as I, and see as I the cool
Lymph drawn from thee and mock thy lips; and parch
For ever in continual thirst; and mark
The fair fruit offered to thy hunger fade
Before thy longing eyes? I thought there was
No other as I thro' all the weary lengths
Of Time the gods have made, who pined as I
And found fruition mock him.

Long ago,
When I was young on earth, 'twas a sweet pain

To ride all day in the long chase, and feel
Toil and the summer fire my blood and parch
My lips, while in my father's halls I knew
The cool bath waited, with its marble floor;
And juices from the ripe fruits pressed, and chilled
With snows from far-off peaks; and troops of slaves;
And music and the dance; and fair young forms,
And dalliance, and every joy of sense,
That haunts the dreams of youth, which strength and ease
Corrupt, and vacant hours. Ay, it was sweet
For a while to plunge in these, as fair boys plunge
Naked in summer streams, all veil of shame
Laid by, only the young dear body bathed
And sunk in its delight, while the firm earth,
The soft green pastures gay with innocent flowers,
Or sober harvest fields, show like a dream;
And nought is left, but the young life which floats
Upon the depths of death, to sink, maybe,

And drown in pleasure, or rise at length grown wise
And gain the abandoned shore.

Ah, but at last
The swift desire waxed stronger and more strong,
And feeding on itself, grows tyrannous;
And the parched soul no longer finds delight
In the cool stream of old; nay, this itself,
Smitten by the fire of sense as by a flame,
Holds not its coolness more; and fevered limbs,
Seeking the fresh tides of their youth, may find
No more refreshment, but a cauldron fired
With the fires of nether hell; and a black rage
Usurps the soul, and drives it on to slake
Its thirst with crime and blood.

Longing Desire!
Unsatisfied, sick, impotent Desire!
Oh, I have known it ages long. I knew
Its pain on earth ere yet my life had grown

To its full stature, thro' the weary years
Of manhood, nay, in age itself; I knew
The quenchless weary thirst, unsatisfied
By all the charms of sense, by wealth and power
And homage, always craving, never quenched—
The undying curse of the soul! The ministers
And agents of my will drave far and wide
Through all the land for me, seeking to find
Fresh pleasures for me, who had spent my sum
Of pleasure, and had power, not even in thought,
Nor faculty to enjoy. They tore apart
The sacred claustral doors of home for me,
Defiled the inviolate hearth for me, laid waste
The flower of humble lives, in hope to heal
The sickly fancies of the king, till rose
A cry of pain from all the land; and I
Grew happier for it, since I held the power
To quench desire in blood.

But even thus
The old pain faded not, but swift again
Revived; and thro' the sensual dull lengths
Of my seraglios I stalked, and marked
The glitter of the gems, the precious webs
Plundered from every clime by cruel wars
That strewed the sands with corpses; lovely eyes
That looked no look of love, and fired no more
Thoughts of the flesh; rich meats, and fruits, and wines
Grown flat and savourless; and loathed them all,
And only cared for power; content to shed
Rivers of innocent blood, if only thus
I might appease my thirst. Until I grew
A monster gloating over blood and pain.

Ah, weary, weary days, when every sense
Was satisfied, and nothing left to slake
The parched unhappy soul, except to watch

The writhing limbs and mark the slow blood drip,
Drop after drop, as the life ebbed with it;
In a new thrill of lust, till blood itself
Palled on me, and I knew the fiend I was,
Yet cared not—I who was, brief years ago,
Only a careless boy lapt round with ease,
Stretched by the soft and stealing tide of sense
Which now grew red; nor ever dreamed at all
What Furies lurked beneath it, but had shrunk
In indolent horror from the sight of tears
And misery, and felt my inmost soul
Sicken with the thought of blood. There comes a time
When the insatiate brute within the man,
Weary with wallowing in the mire, leaps forth
Devouring, and the cloven satyr-hoof
Turns to the rending claw, and the lewd leer
To the horrible fanged snarl, and the soul sinks
And leaves the man a devil, all his sin

Grown savourless, and yet he longs to sin·
And longs in vain for ever.

Yet, methinks,
It was not for the gods to leave me thus.
I stinted not their worship, building shrines
To all of them; the Goddess of Love I served
With hecatombs, letting the fragrant fumes
Of incense and the costly steam go up
Of victims year by year; nay, my own son
Pelops, my best beloved, I gave to them,
Offering, as he must, offer who would gain
The great gods' grace, my dearest.

I had gained
Through long and weary orgies that strange sense
Of nothingness and wasted days which takes
The exhausted soul, bearing upon its front
Counterfeit wisdom, when the bitter ash
Of Knowledge, which the sick soul loathes, appears

Like the pure fruit of Wisdom. I had grown
As wizards seem, who mingle sensual rites
And forms impure with murderous spells and dark
Enchantments; till the simple people held
My very weakness wisdom, and believed
That in my blood-stained palace-halls, withdrawn,
I kept the inner mysteries of Zeus
And knew the secret of all Being, who was
A sick and impotent wretch, so sick, so tired,
That even bloodshed palled.
For my stained soul,
Knowing its sin, hastened to purge itself
With every rite and charm which the dark lore
Of priestcraft offered to it. Spells obscene,
The blood of innocent babes, sorceries foul
Muttered at midnight—these could occupy
My weary days; till all my people shrank
To see me, and the mother clasped her child

Who heard the monster pass.
They would not hear,
They listened not—the cold ungrateful gods—
For all my supplications; nay, the more
I sought them were they hidden.
At the last
A dark voice whispered nightly: 'Thou, poor wretch,
That art so sick and impotent, thyself
The source of all thy misery, the great gods
Ask a more precious gift and excellent
Than alien victims which thou prizest not
And givest without a pang. But shouldst thou take
Thy costliest and fairest offering
'Twere otherwise. The life which thou hast given
Thou mayst recall. Go, offer at the shrine
Thy best beloved Pelops, and appease
Zeus and the averted gods, and know again
The youth and joy of yore.'

Night after night,
While all the halls were still, and the cold stars
Were fading into dawn, I lay awake
Distraught with warring thoughts, my throbbing brain
Filled with that dreadful voice. I had not shrunk
From blood, but this, the strong son of my youth—
How should I dare this thing? And all day long
I would steal from sight of him and men, and fight
Against the dreadful thought, until the voice
Seared all my burning brain, and clamoured, 'Kill!
Zeus bids thee, and be happy.' Then I rose
At midnight, when the halls were still, and raised
The arras, and stole soft to where my son
Lay sleeping. For one moment on his face
And stalwart limbs I gazed, and marked the rise
And fall of his young breast, and the soft plume
Which drooped upon his brow, and felt a thrill
Of yearning; but the cold voice urging me

Burned me like fire. Three times I gazed and turned
Irresolute, till last it thundered at me,
'Strike, fool! thou art in hell; strike, fool! and lose
The burden of thy chains.' Then with slow step
I crept as creeps the tiger on the deer,
Raised high my arm, shut close my eyes, and plunged
My dagger in his heart.

And then, with a flash,
The veil fell downward from my life and left
Myself to me—the daily sum of sense—
The long continual trouble of desire—
The stain of blood blotting the stain of lust—
The weary foulness of my days, which wrecked
My heart and brain, and left me at the last
A madman and accursèd; and I knew,
Far higher than the sensual slopes which held
The gods whom erst I worshipped, a white peak
Of Purity, and a stern voice pealing doom—

Not the mad voice of old—which pierced so deep
Within my life, that with the reeking blade
Wet with the heart's blood of my child I smote
My guilty heart in twain.
Ah! fool, to dream
That the long stain of time might fade and merge
In one poor chrism of blood. They taught of yore,
My priests who flattered me—nor knew at all
The greater God I know, who sits afar
Beyond those earthly shapes, passionless, pure,
And awful as the Dawn—that the gods cared
For costly victims, drinking in the steam
Of sacrifice when the choice hecatombs
Were offered for my wrong. Ah no! there is
No recompense in these, nor any charm
To cleanse the stain of sin, but the long wear.
Of suffering, when the soul which seized too much
Of pleasure here, grows righteous by the pain

Which doth redress its wrong. For what is Right
But equipoise of Nature, alternating
The Too Much by Too Little? Not on earth
The salutary silent forces work
Their final victory, but year on year
Passes, and age on age, and leaves the debt
Unsatisfied, while the o'erburdened soul
Unloads itself in pain.
Therefore it is
I suffer as I suffered ere swift death
Set me not free, no otherwise; and yet
There comes a healing purpose in my pain
I never knew on earth; nor ever here
The once-loved evil grows, only the tale
Of penalties grown greater hourly dwarfs
The accomplished sum of wrong. And yet desire
Pursues me still—sick, impotent desire,
Fiercer than that of earth.

We are ourselves
Our heaven and hell, the joy, the penalty,
The yearning, the fruition. Earth is hell
Or heaven, and yet not only earth; but still,
After the swift soul leaves the gates of death,
The pain grows deeper and less mixed, the joy
Purer and less alloyed, and we are damned
Or blest, as we have lived."
He ceased, with a wail
Like some complaining wind among the pines
Or pent among the wave-worn ocean caves,
A sick, sad sound.
Then as I looked, I saw
His eyes glare horribly, his dry parched lips
Open, his weary hands stretch idly forth
As if to clutch the air—infinite pain
And mockery of hope. "Seest thou them now?"
He said. "I thirst, I parch, I famish, yet

They still elude me,—fair and tempting fruit
And cooling waters. Now they come again.
See, they are in my grasp, they are at my lips.
Now I shall quench me. Nay, again they fly
And mock me. Seest thou them, or am I shut
From hope for ever, hungering, thirsting still,
A madman and in Hell?"

And as I passed
In horror, his large eyes and straining hands
Froze all my soul with pity.

Then it was
A woman whom I saw: a dark pale Queen,
With passion in her eyes, and fear and pain
Holding her steadfast gaze, like one who sees
Some dreadful deed of wrong worked out and knows
Himself the cause, yet now is powerless
To stay the wrong he would.
Seeing me gaze
In pity on her pain, she turned and spake
With a low wailing voice—
"Thou well mayst gaze
With horror on me, sir, for I am lost;
I have shed the innocent blood, long years ago,
Nay, centuries of pain. I have shed the blood
Of him I loved, and found for recompense

But self-inflicted death and age-long woe,
Which purges not my sin. And yet not I
It was who did it, but the gods, who took
A woman's loveless heart and tortured it
With love as with a fire. It was not I
Who slew my love, but Fate. Fate 'twas which brought
My love and me together, Fate which barred
The path of blameless love, yet set Love's flame
To burn and smoulder in a hopeless heart,
Where no relief might come.
The King was old,
And I a girl. 'Tis an old tale which runs
Thro' the sad ages, and 'twas mine. He had spent
His sum of love long since, and I—I knew not
A breath of Love as yet. Ah, it is strange
To lose the sense of maidenhood, drink deep
Of life to the very dregs, and yet not know
A flutter of Love's wing. Love takes no thought

For pomp, or palace, or respect of men;
Nor always in the stately marriage bed,
Closed round by silken curtains, laid on down;
Nestles a rosy form; but 'mid wild flowers
Or desert tents, or in the hind's low cot,
Beneath the aspect of the unconscious stars,
Dwells all night and is blest.
My love, my life!
He was the old man's son, a fair white soul—
Not like the others, whom the fire of youth
Burns like a flame and hurries unrestrained
Thro' riotous days and nights, but virginal
And pure as any maid. No wandering glance
He deigned for all the maidens young and fair
Who sought their Prince's eye. But evermore,
Upon the high lawns wandering alone,
He dwelt unwed; weaving to Artemis,
Fairest of all Olympian maids, a wreath

From the unpolluted meads, where never herd
Drives his white flock, nor ever scythe has come,
But the bee sails upon unfettered wing
Over the spring-like lawns, and Purity
Waters them with soft dews;* and yet he showed
Of all his peers most manly—heart and soul
A very man, tender and true, and strong
And pitiful, and in his limbs and mien
Fair as Apollo's self.

It was at first
In Trœzen that I saw him, when he came
To greet his sire. Amid the crowd of youths
He showed a Prince indeed; yet knew I not
Whom 'twas I saw, nor that I held the place
Which was his mother's, only from the throng
Love, with a barbed dart aiming, pierced my heart
Ere yet I knew what ailed me. Every glance

* Euripides, "Hippolytus," lines 70–78.

Fired me; the youthful grace, the tall straight limbs,
The swelling sinewy arms, the large dark eyes
Tender yet full of passion, the thick locks
Tossed from his brow, the lip and cheek which bore
The down of early manhood, seemed to feed
My heart with short-lived joy.
For when he stood
Forth from the throng and knelt before his sire,
Then raised his eyes to mine, I felt the curse
Of Aphrodité burn me, as it burned
My mother before me, and I dared not meet
His innocent, frank young eyes.
Said I then young?
Ay, but not young as mine. But I had known
The secret things of life, which age the soul
In a moment, writing on its front their mark
Too early ripe; and he was innocent,
My spouse in fitted years, within whose arms

I had defied the world.

I turned away

Like some white bird that leaves the flock, which sails

High in mid air above the haunts of men,

Feeling some little dart within her breast,

Not death, but like to death, and slowly sinks

Down to the earth alone, and bears her hurt

Unseen, by herbless sand and bitter pool,

And pines until the end.

Even from that day

I strove to gain his love. Nay, 'twas not I,

But the cruel gods who drove me. Day by day

We were together; for in days of old

Women were free, not pent in gilded jails

As afterwards, but free to walk alone,

For good or evil, free. I hardly took

Thought for my spouse, the King. For I had found

My love at last: what matter if it were

A guilty love? Yet love is love indeed,
Stronger than heaven or hell. Day after day
I set myself to tempt him from his proud
And innocent way, for I had spurned aside
Care for the gods or men—all but my love.

What need to tell the tale? Was it a sigh,
A blush, a momentary glance, which brought
Assurance of my triumph? It is long
Since I have lived, I cannot tell; I know
Only the penalty of death and hell
Which followed on my sin. I knew he loved.
It was not wonderful, seeing that we dwelt
A boy and girl together. I was fair,
And Eros fired my eyes and lent my voice
His own soft tremulous tones. But when our souls
Trembled upon the verge, and fancy feigned
His arms around me as we fled alone

To some free land of exile, lo! a scroll:
'Dearest, it may not be; I fear the Gods;
We dare not do this wrong. I go from hence
And see thy face no more. Farewell! Forget
The love we may not own; go, seek for both
Forgiveness from the gods.'
When I read the words,
The cruel words, methought my heart stood still,
And when the ebbing life returned I seemed
To have lost all thought of Love. Only Revenge
Dwelt with me still, the fiercer that I knew
My long-prized hope, which came so near success,
Snatched from me and for ever.
When I rose
From my deep swoon, I bade a messenger
Go, seek the King for me. He came and sate
Beside my couch, and all the doors were closed,
And all withdrawn. Then with the liar's art,

And hypocrite tears, and feigned reluctancy,
And all the subtle wiles a woman draws
From the armoury of hate, I did instil
The poison to his soul. Cunning devices,
Feigned sorrow, mention of his son, regrets,
And half confessions—these, with hateful skill
Confused together, drove the old man's soul
To frenzy; and I watched him, with a sneer,
Turn to a dotard thirsting for the life
Of his own child. But how to do the deed,
Yet shed no blood, nor know the people's hate,
Who loved the Prince, I knew not.
Till one day
The old man, looking out upon the sea,
Besought the dread Poseidon to avenge
The treachery of his son. Even as we stood
Gazing upon the breathless blue, a cloud
Rose from the deep, a little fleecy cloud,

Which sudden grew and grew, and turned the blue
To purple; and a swift wind rose and sang
Higher and higher, and the wine-dark sea
Grew ruffled, and within the circling bay
The tiny ripples, stealing up the sand,
Plunged loud with manes of foam, until they swelled
To misty surges thundering on the shore.

Then at the old man's elbow as I stood,
A deep dark thought, sent by the powers of ill,
Answering, as now I know, my own black hate
And not my poor dupe's anger, fired my soul
And bade me speak. 'The god has heard thy prayer,'
I whispered; 'see the surge which wakes and swells
To fury; well I know what things shall be.
It is Poseidon's voice sounds in the storm
And sends thy vengeance. Young Hippolytus
Loves, as thou knowest, on the yellow sand,

Hard by the rippled margin of the wave,
To urge his flying steeds. Bid him go forth—
He will obey—and see what recompense
The god will send his wrong."
In the old man's eyes
A watery gleam of malice played awhile—
I hated him for it—and he bade his son
Drive forth his chariot on the sand, and yoke
His three young fiery steeds.
And still the storm
Blew fiercer and more fierce, and the white crests
Plunged on the strand, and the high promontories
Resounded counter-stricken, and a mist
Of foam, blown landward, hid the sounding shore.

Then saw I him come forth and bid them yoke
His untamed colts. I had not seen his face
Since that last day, but, seeing him, I felt

The old love spring anew, yet mixed with hate—
A storm of warring passions. Tho' I knew
What end should come, yet would I speak no word
That might avert it. The old man looked forth;
I think he had well-nigh forgotten all
The wrong he fancied and the doom he prayed,
All but the father's pride in the strong son,
Who was so young and bold. I saw a smile
Upon the dotard's face, when now the steeds
Were harnessed and the chariot, on the sand
Along the circling margin of the bay,
Flew, swift as light. A sudden gleam of sun
Flashed on the silver harness as it went,
Burned on the brazen axles of the wheels;
And on the golden fillets of the Prince
Doubled the gold. Sometimes a larger wave
Would dash in mist around him, and in fear
The rearing coursers plunged, and then again

The strong young arm constrained them, and they flashed
To where the wave-worn foreland ends the bay.

And then he turned his chariot, a bright speck
Now seen, now hidden, but always, tho' the surge
Broke round it, safe; emerging like a star
From the white clouds of foam. And as I watched,
Speaking no word, and breathing scarce a breath,
I saw the firm limbs strongly set apart
Upon the chariot, and the reins held high,
And the proud head bent forward, with long locks
Streaming behind, as nearer and more near
The swift team rushed—until, with a half joy,
It seemed as if my love might yet elude
The slow sure anger of the god, dull wrath
Swayed by a woman's lie.

But on the verge,
As I cast my eyes, a vast and purple wall

Swelled swiftly towards the shore; the lesser waves
Sank as it came, and to its toppling crest
The spume-flecked waters, from the strand drawn back,
Left dry the yellow shore. Onward it came,
Hoarse, capped with breaking foam, lurid, immense,
Rearing its dreadful height. The chariot sped
Nearer and nearer. I could see my love
With the light of victory in his eyes, the smile
Of daring on his lips: so near he came
To where the marble palace-wall confined
The narrow strip of shore—his brave young eyes
Fixed steadfast on the goal, in the pride of life,
Without a thought of death. I strove to cry,
But terror choked my breath. Then, like a bull
Upon the windy level of the plain
Lashing himself to rage, the furious wave,
Poising itself a moment, tossing high
Its wind-vexed crest, dashed downward on the sand

With a stamp, with a rush, with a roar.
And when I looked,
The shore, the fields, the plain, were one white sea
Of churning, seething foam—chariot and steeds
Gone, and my darling on the wave's white crest
Tossed high, whirled down, beaten, and bruised, and flung,
Dying upon the marble.

My great love
Sprang up redoubled, and cast out my hate
And spurned all thought of fear; and down the stair
I hurried, and upon the bleeding form
I threw myself, and raised his head, and clasped
His body to mine, and kissed him on the lips,
And in his dying ear confessed my wrong,
And saw the horror in his dying eyes
And knew that I was damned. And when he breathed
His last pure breath, I rose and slowly spake—

Turned to a Fury now by love and pain—
To the old man who knelt, while all the throng
Could hear my secret: 'See, thou fool, I am
The murderess of thy son, and thou my dupe,
Thou and thy gods. See, he was innocent;
I murdered him for love. I scorn ye all,
Thee and thy gods together, who are deceived
By a woman's lying tongue! Oh, doting fool,
To hate thy own! And ye, false powers, which punish
The innocent and let the guilty soul
Escape unscathed, I hate ye all—I curse,
I loathe you!'
Then I stooped and kissed my love,
And left them in amaze; and up the stair
Swept slowly to my chamber, and therein,
Hating my life and cursing men and gods,
I did myself to death.
But even here,

I find my punishment. Oh, dreadful doom
Of souls like mine! To see their evil done
Always before their eyes, the one dread scene
Of horror. See, the dark wave on the verge
Towers horrible, and he—— Oh, Love, my Love!
Safety is near! quick! quicker! urge them on!
Thou wilt 'scape it yet!—Nay, nay, it bursts on him!
I have shed the innocent blood! Oh, dreadful gaze
Within his glazing eyes! Hide them, ye gods!
Hide them! I cannot bear them. Quick! a dagger!
I will lose their glare in death. Nay, die I cannot;
I must endure and live—Death brings not peace
To the lost souls in Hell."
And her eyes stared,
Rounded with horror, and she stooped and gazed
So eagerly, and pressed her fevered hands
Upon her trembling forehead with such pain
As drives the gazer mad.

Then as I passed,
I marked against the hardly dawning sky
A toilsome figure standing, bent and strained,
Before a rocky mass, which with great pain
And agony of labour it would thrust
Up a steep hill. But when upon the crest
It poised a moment, then I held my breath
With dread, for, lo! the poor feet seemed to clutch
The hillside as in fear, and the poor hands
With hopeless fingers pressed into the stone

In agony, and the limbs stiffened, and a cry
Like some strong swimmer's, whom the mightier stream
Sweeps downward, and he sees his children's eyes
Upon the bank, broke from him; and at last,
After long struggles of despair, the limbs
Relaxed, and as I closed my fearful eyes,
Seeing the inevitable doom—a crash,
A horrible thunderous noise, as down the steep
The shameless fragment leapt. From crag to crag
It bounded ever swifter, striking fire
And wrapt in smoke, as to the lowest depths
Of the vale it tore, and seemed to take with it
The miserable form whose painful gaze
I caught, as with the great rock whirled and dashed
Downward, and marking every crag with gore
And long gray hairs, it plunged, yet living still,
To the black hollow; and then a silence came
More dreadful than the noise, and a low groan

Was all that I could hear.

When to the foot

Of the dark steep I hurried, half in hope

To find the victim dead—not recognizing

The undying life of Hell—I seemed to see

An aged man, bruised, bleeding, with gray hairs,

And eyes from which the cunning leer of greed

Was scarcely yet gone out.

A crafty voice

It was that answered me, the voice of guile

Part purified by pain:

"There comes not death

To those who live in Hell, nor hardly pause

Of suffering longer than may serve to make

The pain renewed, more piercing. Long ago,

I thought that I had cheated Death, and now

I seek him; but he comes not, nor know I

If ever he will hear me. Whence art thou?

Comest thou from earthly air, or whence? What power
Has brought thee hither? For I know indeed
Thou art not lost as I; for never here
I look upon a human face, nor see
The ghosts who doubtless here on every side
Suffer a common pain, only at times
I hear the echo of a shriek far off,
Like some faint ghost of woe which fills the pause
And interval of suffering; but from whom
The voice may come, or whence, I know not, only
The air teems with vague pain, which doth distract
The ear when for a moment comes surcease
Of suffering, and the sense of effort spent
In vain and fruitless labour, and the pang
Of long-deferred defeat, which waits and takes
The world-worn heart, and maddens it when all
Heaven, conscience, happiness, are staked and lost
For gains which still elude it.

Yet 'twas sweet,
A King in early youth, when pleasure is sweet,
To live the fair successful years, and know
The envy and respect of men. I cared
For none of youth's delights: the dance, the song,
Allured me not; the smooth soft ways of sense
Tempted me not at all. I could despise
The follies that I shared not, spending all
The long laborious days in toilsome schemes
To gain to wealth and power, and, as I grew
In honour and fame, finding my hoarded gains
Transmuted into Power. The seas were white
With laden argosies, and all were mine.
The sheltering moles defied the wintry storms,
And all were mine. The marble aqueducts,
The costly bridges, all were mine. Fair roads
Wound round and round the hills—my work. The gods
Alone I heeded not, nor cared at all

For aught but that my eyes and ears might take,
Spurning invisible things, nor built I to them
Temple or shrine, wrapt up in life, set round
With earthly blessings like a god. I rose
To such excess of weal and fame and pride,
My people held me god-like. I grew drunk
With too great power, scoffing at men and gods,
Careless of both, but not averse to fling
To those too weak themselves, what benefits
My larger wisdom spurned.
Then suddenly
I knew the pain of failure. Summer storms
Sucked down my fleets even within sight of port.
A grievous blight wasted the harvest-fields,
Mocking my hopes of gain. Wars came and drained
My store, and I grew needy, knowing now
The hell of stronger souls, the loss of power
Wherein they exulted once. There comes no pain

Deeper than to have known delight of power,
And then to lose it all. But I, I would not
Sit tame beneath defeat, trimming my sails
To wait the breeze of Fortune—fickle breath
Which perhaps might breathe no more—but chose instead
By rash conceit and bolder enterprise
To win her aid again. I had no thought
Of selfish gain, only to be and act
As a god to those, feeding my sum of pride
With acted good.
But evermore defeat
Dogged me, and evermore my people grew
To doubt me, seeing no more the wealth, the force,
Which once they worshipped. Then the lust of power
Loved, not for sake of others, but its own,
Grew on me, and the pride which can dare all,
Save failure only, seized me. Evil finds

Its ready chance. There were rich argosies
Upon the seas: I sank them, ship and crew,
In the unbetraying ocean. Wayfarers
Crossing the passes with rich merchandise
My creatures, hid behind the crags, o'erwhelmed
With rocks hurled downward. Yet I spent my gains
For the public weal, not otherwise; and they,
The careless people, took the piteous spoils
Which cost the lives of many, and a man's soul,
And blessed the giver. Empty venal blessings,
Which sting more deep than curses!

For awhile
I was content with this, but at the last
A great contempt and hatred of them took me,
The base, vile churls! Why should I stain my soul
For such as those—dogs that would fawn and lick
The hand that fed them, but, if food should fail,
Would turn and rend me? I would none of them;

I would grow rich and happy, being indeed
Godlike in brain to such. So with all craft,
And guile, and violence I enriched me, loading
My treasuries with gold. My deep-laid schemes
Of gain engrossed the long laborious days,
Stretched far into the night. Enjoy, I might not,
Seeing it was all to do, and life so brief
That ere a man might gain the goal he would,
Lo! Age, and with it Death, and so an end!
For all the tales of the indignant gods,
What were they but the priests'? I had myself
Broken all oaths; long time deceived and ruined
With every phase of fraud the pious fools
Whom oath-sworn Justice bound; battened on blood;
And what was I the worse? How should the gods
Exist if I were happy? Death alone
Was certain. Therefore must I haste to heap
Treasure sufficient for my need, and then

Enjoy the gathered good.

But gradually

There came—not great disasters which might crush

All hope, but petty checks which did decrease

My store, and left my labour vain, and me

Unwilling to enjoy; and gradually

I felt the chill approach of age, which stole

Higher and higher on me, till the life,

As in à paralytic, left my limbs

And heart, and mounted upwards to my brain,

Its last resort, and rested there awhile

Ere it should spread its wings. But even thus,

Tho' powerless to enjoy, the insatiate greed

And thirst of power sustained me, and supplied

Life's spark with some scant fuel, till it seemed,

Year after year, as if I could not die,

Holding so fast to life. I grew so old

That all the comrades of my youth, my prime,

My age, were gone, and I was left alone
With those who knew me not, bereft of all
Except my master passion—an old man
Forlorn, forgotten of the gods and Death.

So all the people, seeing me grow old
And prosperous, held me wise, and spread abroad
Strange fables, growing day by day more strange—
How I deceived the very gods. They thought
That I was happy, knowing not the wear
Of anxious thought, the growing sum of pain,
The failing ear and eye, the slower limbs,
Whose briefer name is Age: and yet I trow
I was not all unhappy, though I knew
It was too late to enjoy, and though my store
Increased not as my greed—nay, even sunk down
A little, year by year. Till, last of all,
When now my time was come and I had grown

A little tired of living, a trivial hurt
Laid me upon my bed; and as I mused
On my long life and all its villanies,
The wickedness I did, the blood I shed,
The guile, the frauds of years—they came with news,
One now, and now another; how my schemes
Were crushed, my enterprises lost, my toil
And labour all in vain. Day after day
They brought these tidings, while I longed to rise
And stay the tide of ill, and raved to know
I could not. At the last the added sum
Of evil, like yon great rock poised awhile
Uncertain, gathered into one, o'erwhelmed
My feeble strength, and left me ruined and lost,
And showed me all I was, and all the depth
And folly of my sin, and racked my brain,
And sank me in despair and misery,
And broke my heart and slew me.

Therefore 'tis
I spend the long, long centuries which have come
Between me and my sin, in such dread tasks
As that thou sawest. In the soul I sinned:
In body and soul I suffer. What I bade
My minions do to others, that of woe
I bear myself; and in the pause of ill,
As now, I know again the bitter pang
Of failure, which of old pierced thro' my soul
And left me to despair. The pain of mind
Is fiercer far than any bodily ill,
And both are mine—the pang of torture-pain
Always recurring; and, far worse, the pang
Of consciousness of black sins sinned in vain—
The doom of constant failure.

Will, fierce Will!
Thou parent of unrest and toil and woe,
Measureless effort! growing day by day,

To force strong souls along the giddy steep
That slopes to the pit of Hell, where effort serves
Only to speed destruction! Yet I know
Thou art not, as some hold, the primal curse
Which doth condemn us, since thou bearest in thee
"'No power to satisfy thyself, but rather,
The spring of act, whereby in earth and heaven
Both men and gods do breathe and live and are,
Since Life is Act and not to Do is Death—
I do not blame thee: but to work in vain
Is bitterest penalty: to find at last
The soul all fouled with sin and stained with blood
In vain; ah, this is hell indeed—the hell
Of lost and striving souls!"
Then as I passed,
The halting figure bent itself again
To the old task, and up the rugged steep
Thrust the great rock with groanings. Horror chained

My parting footsteps, like a nightmare dream
Which holds us that we flee not, with wide eyes
That loathe to see, yet cannot choose but gaze
Till all be done. Slowly, with dreadful toil
And struggle and strain, and bleeding hands and knees,
And more than mortal strength, against the hill
He pressed, the wretched one! till with long pain
He trembled on the summit, a gaunt form,
With that great rock above him, poised and strained,
Now gaining, now receding, now in act
To win the summit, now borne down again,
And then the inevitable crash—the mass
Leaping from crag to crag. But ere it ceased
In dreadful silence, and the low groan came,
My limbs were loosed with one convulsive bound.
I hid my face within my hands, and fled,
Surfeit with horror.

Then it was again
A woman whom I saw, pitiless, stern,
Bearing the brand of blood—a lithe dark form,
And cruel eyes which glared beneath the gems
Which argued her a Queen, and on her side
An ancient stain of gore, which did befoul
Her royal robe. A murderess in thought
And dreadful act, who took within the toils
Her kingly Lord, and slew him of old time
After burnt Troy. I had no time to speak
When she shrieked thus :

"It doth repent me not

I would 'twere yet to do, and I would do it
Again a thousand times, if the shed blood
Might for one hour restore to me the kisses
Of my Ægisthus. Oh, he was divine,
My hero, with the godlike locks and eyes
Of Eros' self! What boots it that they prate
Of wifely duty, love of spouse or child,
Honour or pity, when the fierce flame takes
A woman's heart, and burns it out, and leaps
With fierce forked tongue around it, till it lies
In ashes, a dead heart, nor aught remains
Of old affections, naught but the new flame
Which is unquenched desire?
It did not come,
My blessing, all at once, but the slow fruit
Of solitude and midnight loneliness,
And weary waiting for the tardy news
Of taken Troy. Long years I sate alone,

Widowed, within my palace, while my Lord
Was over seas, waging the accursèd war,
First of the file of Kings. Year after year
Came false report, or harder, no report
Of the great fleet. The summers waxed and waned,
The wintry surges smote the sounding shores,
And yet there came no end of it. They brought
Now hopeless failure, now great victories;
And all alike were false, all but delay
And hope deferred, which cometh not, but breaks
The heart which suffering wrings not.
So I bore
Long time the solitary years, and sought
With motherly cares to solace the dull days
For those my Lord had left me. My firstborn,
Iphigeneia, sailed at first with him
Upon that fatal voyage, but the young
Orestes and Electra stayed with me—

Not dear as she was, for the firstborn takes
The mother's heart, and, with the milk it draws
From the mother's virgin breast, drains all the love
It bore, ay, even tho' the sire be dear;
Much more, then, when he is a King indeed,
Mighty in war and council, but too high
To stoop to a woman's love. But she was gone,
Nor heard I tidings of her, knowing not
If yet she walked the earth, nor if she bore
The load of children, even as I had borne
Her in my opening girlhood, when I leapt
From child to Queen, but never loved the King.

Thus the slow years rolled onward, till at last
There came a dreadful rumour—'She is dead,
Thy daughter, years ago. The cruel priests
Clamoured for blood; the stern cold Kings stood round
Without a tear, and he, her sire, with them,

To see a virgin bleed. They cut with knives
The taper girlish throat; they watched the blood
Drip slowly on the sand, and the young life
Meek as a lamb come to the sacrifice
To appease the angry gods.' And he, the King,
Her father, stood by too, and saw them do it,
The wickedness, breathing no word of wrath,
Till all was done! The cowards! the dull cowards!
I would some black storm, bursting suddenly,
Had whelmed them and their fleets, ere yet they dared
To waste an innocent life!
I had gone mad,
I know it, but for him, my love, my dear,
My fair sweet love. He came to comfort me
With words of friendship, holding that my Lord
Was bound, perhaps, to let her die—'The gods
Were ofttimes hard to appease, or was it indeed
The priests who asked it? Were there any gods?

Or only phantoms, creatures of the brain,
Born of the fears of men, the greed of priests,
Useful to govern women? Had he been
Lord of the fleet, not all the soothsayers
Who ever frighted cowards should have brought
His soul to such black depths.' I hearkening to him
As 'twere my own thought grown articulate,
Found my grief turn to hate, and hate to love—
Hate of my Lord, love of the voice which spoke
Such dear and comfortable words. And so
Love, to a storm of passion growing, swept
My wounded soul and dried my tears, as dries
The hot sirocco all the bitter pools
Of salt among the sand. I never knew
True love before; I was a child, no more,
When the King cast his eyes on me. What is it
To have borne the weight of offspring 'neath the zone,
If Love be not their sire; or live long years

Of commerce, not of love? Better a day
Of Passion than the long unlovely years
Of wifely duty, when Love cometh not
To wake the barren days!
And yet at first
I hesitated long, nor would embrace
The blessing that was mine. We are hedged round,
We women, by such close-fenced ordinances,
Set round us by our tyrants, that we fear
To overstep a hand's breadth the dull bounds
Of custom; but at last Love, waking in me,
Burst all my chains asunder, and I lived
For naught but Love.
My son, the young Orestes,
I sent far off; my girl Electra only
Remained, too young to doubt me, and I knew
At last what 'twas to live.
So the swift years

Fleeted and found me happy, till the dark
Ill-omened day when Rumour, thousand-tongued,
Whispered of taken Troy; and from my dream
Of happiness, sudden I woke, and knew
The coming retribution. We had grown
Too loving for concealment, and our tale
Of mutual love was bruited far and wide
Through Argos. All the gossips bruited it,
And were all tongue to tell it to my Lord
When he should come. And should I let the man
I never loved, the murderer of my girl,
Come 'twixt my love and me? A swift resolve
Flashed through me pondering on it: 'Love for Love
And Blood for Blood—the simple golden rule
Taught by the elder gods.

When I had taken
My fixed resolve, I grew impatient for it,
Counting the laggard days. Oh, it was sweet

To simulate the yearning of a wife
Long parted from her Lord, and mock the fools
Who dogged each look and word, and but for fear
Had torn me from my throne—the pies, the jays,
The impotent chatterers, who thought by words
To stay me in the act! 'Twas sweet to mock them
And read distrust within their eyes, when I,
Knowing my purpose, bade them quick prepare
All fitting honours for the King, and knew
They dared not disobey—oh, 'twas enough
To hurry the dull hours.

But when at last
I saw his sails upon the verge, and then
The battered ship, and marked his face grown old,
The body a little bent, which was so straight,
The thin gray hairs which were the raven locks
Of manhood when he went, I felt a moment
I could not do the deed. But when I saw

The beautiful sad woman come with him,
The future in her eyes, and her sad voice
Proclaim the tale of doom, two thoughts at once
Assailed me, bidding me despatch with a blow
Him and his mistress, making sure the will
Of fate, and my revenge.

Oh, it was strange
To see all happen as we planned; as 'twere
Some drama oft rehearsed, wherein each step,
Each word, is so prepared, the poorest player
Knows his turn come to do—the solemn landing—
The ride to the palace gate—the courtesies
Of welcome—the mute crowds without—the bath
Prepared within—the precious circling folds
Of tissue stretched around him, shutting out
The gaze, and folding helpless like a net
The mighty limbs—the battle-axe laid down
Against the wall, and I, his wife and Queen,

Alone with him, waiting and watching still,
Till the woman shrieked without. Then with swift step
I seized the axe, and struck him as he lay
Helpless, once, twice, and thrice—once for my girl,
Once for my love, once for the woman, and all
For Fate and my Revenge.
He gave a groan,
Once only, as I thought he might; and then
No sound but the quick gurgling of the blood,
As it flowed from him in streams, and turned the pure
And limpid water of the bath to red—
I had not looked for that—it flowed and flowed,
And seemed to madden me to look on it,
Until my love with hands bloody as mine,
But with the woman's blood, rushed in, and eyes
Rounded with horror; and we turned to go,
And left the dead alone.
But happiness

Still mocked me, and a doubt unknown before
Came on me, and amid the silken shows
And luxury of power I seemed to see
Another answer to my riddle of life
Than that I gave myself, and it was 'murder;'
And in my people's sullen mien and eyes,
'Murder;' and in the mirror, when I looked,
'Murder' glared out, and terror lest my son
Returning, grown to manhood, should avenge
His father's blood. For somehow, as 'twould seem,
The gods, if gods there be, or the stern Fate
Which doth direct our little lives, do filch
Our happiness—though bright with Love's own ray,
There comes a cloud which veils it. Yet, indeed,
My days were happy. I repent me not;
I would wade through seas of blood to know again
Those fierce delights once more.

But my young girl

Electra, grown to woman, turned from me
Her modest maiden eyes, nor loved to set
Her kiss upon my cheek, but, all distraught
With secret care, hid her from all the pomps
And revelries which did befit her youth,
Walking alone; and often at the tomb
Of her lost sire we found her, pouring out
Libations to the dead. And evermore
I did bethink me of my son Orestes,
Who now should be a man; and yearned sometimes
To see his face, yet feared lest from his eyes
His father's soul should smite me.
So I lived
Happy and yet unquiet—a stern voice
Speaking of doom, which long time softer notes
Of careless weal, the music which doth spring
From the fair harmonies of life and love,
Would drown in their own concord. This at times

And daily, stronger grown, and dreadfuller
With dominant accent, marred the sounds of joy
By one prevailing discord. So at length
I came to lose the present in the dread
Of what might come, the penalty that waits
Upon successful sin, who, having sinned,
Had missed my sin's reward.
Until one day
I, looking from my palace casement, saw
A humble suppliant, clad in pilgrim garb,
Approach the marble stair. A sudden throb
Thrilled thro' me, and the mother's heart went forth
Thro' all disguise of garb and rank and years,
Knowing my son. How fair he was, how tall
And vigorous, my boy! What fair straight limbs
And noble port! How beautiful the shade
Of manhood on his lip! I longed to burst
From my chamber down, yearning to throw myself

Upon his neck within the palace court,
Before the guards—spurning my queenly rank,
All but my motherhood. And then a chill
Of doubt o'erspread me, knowing what a gulf
Fate set between our lives, impassable
As that great gulf which yawns 'twixt life and death
And 'twixt this Hell and Heaven. I shrank back,
And turned to think a moment, half in fear,
And half in pain; dividing the swift mind,
Yet all in love.

Then came a cry, a groan,
From the inner court, the clash of swords, the fall
Of a body on the pavement; and one cried,
'The King is dead, slain by the young Orestes,
Who cometh hither.' With the word, the door
Flew open, and my son stood straight before me,
His drawn sword dripping blood. Oh, he was fair
And terrible to see, when from his limbs

The suppliant's mantle fallen, left the mail
And arms of a young warrior. Love and Hate,
Which are the offspring of a common sire,
Strove for the mastery, till within his eyes
I saw his father's ghost glare unappeased
From out Love's casements.

Then I knew my fate
And his—mine to be slain by my son's hand,
And his to slay me, since the Furies drave
Our lives to one destruction; and I took
His point within my breast.

But I praise not
The selfish, careless gods who wrecked our lives,
Making the King the murderer of his girl,
And me his murderess; making my son
The murderer of his mother and her love—
A mystery of blood!—I curse them all,
The careless Forces, sitting far withdrawn

Upon the heights of Space, taking men's lives
For playthings, and deriding as in sport
Our happiness and woe—I curse them all.
We have a right to joy; we have a right,
I say, as they have. Let them stand confessed
The puppets that they are—too weak to give
The good they feign to love, since Fate, too strong
For them as us, beyond their painted sky,
Sits and derides them too. I curse Fate too,
The deaf blind Fury, taking human souls
And crushing them, as a dull fretful child
Crushes its toys and knows not with what skill
Those feeble forms are feigned.
I curse, I loathe,
I spit on them. It doth repent me not.
I would 'twere yet to do. I have lived my life.
I have loved. See, there he lies within the bath,
And thus I smite him! thus! Didst hear him groan?

Oh, vengeance, thou art sweet! What, living still?
Ah me! we cannot die! Come, torture me,
Ye Furies—for I love not soothing words—
As once ye did my son. Ye miserable
Blind ministers of Hell, I do defy you;
Not all your torments can undo the Past
Of Passion and of Love!"

Even as she spake
There came a viewless trouble in the air,
Which took her, and a sweep of wings unseen,
And terrible sounds, which swooped on her and hushed
Her voice, and seemed to occupy her soul
With horror and despair; and as she passed
I marked her agonized eyes.

But as I went,

"Full many a dreadful shape of lonely pain
I saw. What need to tell them? We are filled
Who live to-day with a more present sense
Of the great love of God, than those of old
Who, groping in the dawn of Knowledge, saw
Only dark shadows of the Unknown; or he,
First-born of modern singers, who first struck
His awful lyre, and woke the voice of song,
Dumb for long centuries of pain. We dread
To dwell on those long agonies its sin
Brings on the offending soul; we hold a creed
Of deeper Pity, who know what chains of ill
Bind round our petty lives. Each phase of woe

Suffering, and torture which the gloomy thought
Of bigots feigns for others—all were there.
One there was stretched upon a rolling wheel,
Which was the barren round of sense, which still
Returned upon itself and broke the limbs
Bound to it day and night. Others there were
Doomed, with unceasing toil, to fill the urns
Whose precious waters sank ere they could slake
Their burning thirst. Another shapeless soul,
Full of revolts and hates and tyrannous force,
The weight of earth, which was its earth-born taint,
Pressed groaning down, while with fierce beak and claw
The vulture of remorse, piercing his breast,
Preyed on his heart. For others, overhead,
Great crags of rock impending seemed to fall,
But fell not nor brought peace. I felt my soul
Blunted with horrors, yearning to escape
To where, upon the limits of the wood,

Some scanty twilight grew.

But ere I passed

From those grim shades a deep voice sounded near,

A voice without a form.

"There is an end

Of all things that thou seest! There is an end

Of Wrong and Death and Hell! When the long wear

Of Time and Suffering has effaced the stain

Ingrown upon the soul, and the cleansed spirit,

Long ages floating on the wandering winds

Or rolling deeps of Space, renews itself

And doth regain its dwelling, and, once more

Blent with the general order, goes anew

Upon the stream of Things,* and comes at length,

After new deaths, to that dim waiting-place

Thou next shalt see, and with the justified

White souls awaits the End; or, snatched at once,

* Virgil, "Æneid." vi. 740.

If Fate so will, to the pure sphere itself,
Lives and is blest, and works the Eternal Work
Whose name and end is Love! There is an end
Of Wrong and Death and Hell!"

Even as I heard,
I passed from out the shadow of Death and Pain,
Crying, "There is an end!"

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

HADES.

THEN from those dark
And dreadful precincts passing, ghostly fields
And voiceless took me. A faint twilight veiled
The leafless, shadowy trees and herbless plains.
There stirred no breath of air to wake to life
The slumbers of the world. The sky above
Was one gray, changeless cloud. There looked no eye
Of Life from the veiled heavens; the realm of Death
Was round me everywhere. And yet no fear
Nor horror took me here, where was no pain
Nor dread, save that strange tremor which assails

One who in life's hot noontide looks on death
And knows he too shall die. The ghosts which rose
From every darkling copse showed thin and pale—
Thinner and paler far than those I left
In agony, even as Pity seems to wear
A thinner form than Fear.
Not caged alone
Like those the avenging Furies purged were these,
Nor that dim land as those black cavernous depths
Where no hope comes. Fair souls were they and white
Whom there I saw, waiting as we shall wait,
The Beatific End, but thin and pale
As the young faith which made them, touched a little
By the sad memories of the earth; made glad
A little by past joys; no more, and wrapt
In musing on the brief play played by them
Upon the lively earth, yet ignorant
Of the long lapse of years, and what had been

Since they too breathed Life's air, or if they knew,
Keeping some echo only; but their pain
Was fainter than their joy, and a great hope
Like ours possessed them dimly.

First I saw
A youth who pensive leaned against the trunk
Of a dark cypress, and an idle flute
Hung at his side. A sorrowful sad soul,
Such as sometimes he knows, who meets the gaze,
Mute, uncomplaining yet most pitiful,

Of one whom nature, by some secret spite,
Has maimed and left imperfect; or the pain
Which fills a poet's eyes. Beneath his robe
I seemed to see the scar of cruel stripes,
Too hastily concealed. Yet was he not
Wholly unhappy, but from out the core
Of suffering flowed a secret spring of joy,
Which mocked the droughts of Fate, and left him glad
And glorying in his sorrow. As I gazed
He raised his silent flute, and, half ashamed,
Blew a soft note; and as I stayed to hear,
I heard him thus discourse—

"The flute is sweet
To gods and men, but sweeter far the lyre
And voice of a true singer. Shall I fear
To tell of that great trial, when I strove
And Phœbus conquered? Nay, no shame it is
To bow to an immortal melody;

But glory.

Once among the Phrygian hills
I lay a-musing,—while the silly sheep
Wandered among the thyme—upon the bank
Of a clear mountain stream, beneath the pines,
Safe hidden from the noon. A dreamy haze
Played on the uplands, but the hills were clear
In sunlight, and no cloud was on the sky.
It was the time when a deep silence comes
Upon the summer earth, and all the birds
Have ceased from singing, and the world is still
As midnight, and if any live thing move—
Some fur-clad creature, or cool gliding snake—
Within the pipy overgrowth of weeds,
The ear can catch the rustle, and the trees
And earth and air are listening. As I lay,
Faintly, as in a dream, I seemed to hear
A tender music, like the Æolian chords,

Sound low within the woodland, whence the stream,
Flowed full, yet silent. Long, with ear to ground,
I hearkened; and the sweet strain, fuller grown,
Rounder and clearer came, and danced along
In mirthful measure now, and now grown grave
In dying falls, and sweeter and more clear,
Tripping at nuptials and high revelry,
Wailing at burials, rapt in soaring thoughts,
Chanting strange sea-tales full of mystery,
Touching all chords of being, and life and death,
Now rose, now sank, and always was divine,
So strange the music came.
Till, as I lay
Enraptured, swift a sudden discord rang,
And all the sound grew still, a sudden flash,
As from a sunlit jewel, fired the wood,
A noise of water smitten, and on the hills
A fair white fleece of cloud, which swiftly climbed

Into the farthest heaven. Then, as I mused,
Knowing a parting goddess, straight I saw
A sudden splendour float upon the stream,
And knew it for this jewelled flute, which paused
Before me on an eddy. It I snatched
Eager, and to my ardent lips I bore
The wonder, and behold, with the first breath—
The first warm human breath, the silent strains,
The half drowned notes which late the goddess blew,
Revived and sounded, clearer, sweeter far
Than mortal skill could make; so with delight
I left my flocks to wander o'er the wastes
Untended, and the wolves and eagles seized
The tender lambs, but I was for my art—
Nought else; and though the high-pitched notes divine
Grew faint, yet something lingered, and at last
So sweet a note I sounded of my skill,
That all the Phrygian highlands, all the white

Hill villages, were fain to hear the strain,
Which the mad shepherd made.
So, overbold,
And rapt in my new art, at last I dared
To challenge Phœbus' self.
'Twas a fair day
When sudden, on the mountain side, I saw
A train of fleecy clouds in a white band
Descending. Down the gleaming pinnacles
And difficult crags they floated, and the arch,
Drawn with its thousand hues against the sun,
Hung like a glory o'er them. Midst the pines
They clothed themselves with form, and straight I knew
The immortals. Young Apollo, with his lyre,
Kissed by the sun, and all the Muses clad
In robes of gleaming white; then a great fear,
Yet mixed with joy, assailed me, for I knew
Myself a mortal equalled with the gods.

Ah me! how fair they were! how fair and dread
In face and form, they showed, when now they came
Upon the thymy slope, and the young god
Lay with his choir around him, beautiful
And bold as Youth and Dawn! There was no cloud
Upon the sky, nor any sound at all
When I began my strain. No coward fear
Of what might come restrained me; but an awe
Of those immortal eyes and ears divine
Looking and listening. All the earth seemed full
Of ears for me alone—the woods, the fields,
The hills, the skies were listening. Scarce a sound
My flute might make, such subtle harmonies
The silence seemed to weave round me and flout
The half unuttered thought. Till last I blew,
As now, a hesitating note, and lo!
The breath divine, lingering on mortal lips,

Hurried my soul along to such fair rhymes,
Sweeter than wont, that swift I knew my life
Rise up within me, and expand, and all
The human, which so nearly is divine,
Was glorified, and on the Muses' lips,
And in their lovely eyes, I saw a fair
Approval, and my soul in me was glad.

For all the strains I blew were strains of love—
Love striving, love triumphant, love that lies
Within beloved arms, and wreathes his locks
With flowers, and lets the world go by and sings
Unheeding; and I saw a kindly gleam
Within the Muses' eyes, who were, indeed,
Women, though god-like.

But upon the face
Of the young Sun-god only haughty scorn
Sate, and he swiftly struck his golden lyre,

And played the Song of Life; and lo, I knew
My strain, how earthy! Oh, to hear the young
Apollo playing! and the hidden cells
And chambers of the universe displayed
Before the charmèd sound! I seemed to float
In some enchanted cave, where the wave dips
In from the sunlit sea, and floods its depths
With reflex hues of heaven. My soul was rapt
By that I heard, and dared to wish no more
For victory; and yet because the sound
Of music that is born of human breath
Comes straighter from the soul than any strain
The hand alone can make, therefore I knew,
With a mixed thrill of pity and delight,
The nine immortal Sisters hardly touched
By this fine strain of music, as by mine,
And when the high lay trembled to its close,
Still doubting.

Then upon the Sun-god's face
There passed a cold proud smile. He swept his lyre
Once more, then laid it down, and then with voice,
The voice of godhead, sang. Oh, ecstasy,
Oh happiness of him who once has heard
Apollo singing! For his ears the sound
Of grosser music dies, and all the earth
Is full of subtle undertones, which change
The listener and transform him. As he sang—
Of what I know not, but the music touched
Each chord of being—I felt my secret life
Stand open to it, as the parched earth yawns
To drink the summer rain; and at the call
Of those refreshing waters, all my thought
Stir from its dark and secret depths, and burst
Into sweet, odorous flowers, and from their wells
Deep call to deep, and all the mystery
Of all that is, laid open. As he sang,

I saw the Nine, with lovely pitying eyes,
Sign 'He has conquered.' Yet I felt no pang
Of fear, only deep joy that I had heard
Such music while I lived, even though it brought
Torture and death. For what were it to lie
Sleek, crowned with roses, drinking vulgar praise,
And surfeited with offerings, the dull gift
Of ignorant hands, all which I might have known,
To this diviner failure? Godlike 'tis
To fail upon the icy ledge, and fall
Where other footsteps dare not. So I knew
My fate, and it was near.

For to a pine
They bound me willing, and with cruel stripes
Tore me, and took my life.

But from my blood
Was born the poets' race, and on its flow
My poor flute, to the cool swift river borne,

Floated, and thence adown a lordlier stream
Into the deep, wide sea. I do not blame
Phœbus, or Nature which has set this bar
Betwixt success and failure, for I know
How far high failure overleaps the bound
Of low successes. Only suffering draws
The inner heart of song and can elicit
The perfumes of the soul. 'Twere not enough
To fail, for that were happiness to him
Who ever upward looks with reverent eye
And seeks but to admire. So, since the race
Of bards soars highest; as who seek to show
Ourselves as in a glass; therefore it comes
That suffering weds with song, from the blind bard,
Who solaced his blank darkness with his verse
Through all the story of neglect and scorn,
Necessity, sheer hunger, early death,
Which smite the ranks of song. Not only those

Who hold clear echoes of the voice divine
Are honourable—they are blest, indeed,
Whate'er the world has held—but those who hear
Some fair faint echoes, though the crowd be deaf,
And see the white gods' garments on the hills,
Which the crowd sees not, though they may not find
Fit music for their visions; they are blest,
Not pitiable. Not from arrogant pride
Nor over boldness fail they who have striven
To tell what they have heard, yet find no voice
For such high message. More it is than ease,
Palace and pomp, honours and luxuries,
To have seen white Presences upon the hills,
To have heard the voices of the Eternal Gods."

So spake he, and I seemed to look on him,
Whose sad young eyes grow on us from the page
Of his own verse: who did himself to death:

Or whom the dullard slew: or whom the sea
Rapt from us: and I passed without a word,
Slow, grave, with many musings.

Then I came
On one a maiden, meek with folded hands,
Seated against a rugged face of cliff,
In silent thought. Anon she raised her arms,
Her gleaming arms, above her on the rock,
With hands which clasped each other, till she showed
As in a statue, and her white robe fell
Down from her maiden shoulders, and I knew
The fair form as it seemed chained to the stone

By some invisible gyves, and named her name.
And then she raised her frightened eyes to mine
As one who, long expecting some great fear,
Scarce sees deliverance come. But when she saw
Only a kindly glance, a softer look
Came in them, and she answered to my thought
With a sweet voice and low.

"I did but muse
Upon the painful past, long dead and done,
Forgetting I was saved.

The angry clouds
Burst always on the low flat plains, and swept
The harvest to the ocean; all the land
Was wasted. A great serpent from the deep,
Lifting his horrible head above their homes,
Devoured the children. And the people prayed
In vain to careless gods.

On that dear land,

Which now was turned into a sullen sea,
Gazing in safety from the stately towers
Of my sire's palace, I, a princess, saw,
Lapt in soft luxury, within my bower
The wreck of humble homes come whirling by,
The drowning, bleating flocks, the bellowing herds,
The grain scarce husbanded by toiling hands
Upon the sunlit plain, rush to the sea,
With floating corpses. On the rain-swept hills
The remnant of the people huddled close,
Homeless and starving. All my being was full
Of pity for them, and I strove to do
What food and shelter and compassionate hands
Of woman might. I took the little ones
And clasped them shivering to the virgin breast
Which knew no other touch but theirs, and gave
Raiment and food. My sire, not stern to me,
Smiled on me as he saw. My gentle mother,

Who loved me with a love exceeding that
Which mothers bear their girls, and sunned herself
In my fresh beauty, seeing in my young eyes
Her own fair vanished youth, doted on me,
And fain had kept my eyes from the sad sights
That pained them. But my heart was sad in me,
Seeing the ineffable miseries of life,
And that mysterious anger of the gods,
And helpless to allay them. All in vain
Were prayer and supplication, all in vain
The costly victims steamed. The vengeful clouds
Hid the fierce sky, and still the ruin came,
And wallowing his grim length within the flood,
Over the ravaged fields and homeless homes,
The dread sea-monster raged, sating his jaws
With blood and rapine.
Then to the dread shrine
Of Ammon went the priests, and reverend chiefs

Of all the nation. White robed, at their head,
Went slow my royal sire. The oracle
Spoke clear, not as ofttimes in words obscure,
Ambiguous. And as we went to meet
The suppliants—she who bare me, with her head
Upon my neck—we cheerful and with song
Welcomed their swift return, auguring well
From such a quick-sped mission.

But my sire
Hid his face from me, and the crowd of priests
And nobles looked not at us. And no word
Was spoken till at last one drew a scroll
And gave it to the queen, who straightway swooned,
Having read it, on my neck, and then I saw,
I the young girl whose soft life scarcely knew
Shadow of sorrow, I whose heart was full
Of pity for the rest, what doom was mine.

I think I hardly knew in that dread hour
The fear that came anon; I was transformed
Into a champion of my race, made strong
With a new courage, glorying to meet,
In all the ecstasy of sacrifice,
Death face to face. Some god, I know not who,
O'erspread me, and despite my mother's tears
And my stern father's grief, I met my fate
Unshrinking.

When the moon rose clear from cloud
For the first time, far o'er the midnight sea
And the vast watery plain, where were before
Hundreds of happy homes, and well-tilled fields,
And purple vineyards, from my father's towers
The white procession went along the paths,
The high cliff paths, which well I loved of old,
Among the myrtles. Priests with censers went
And offerings, with white robes, and round their heads

The sacred fillet; with his nobles walked
My sire with breaking heart; my mother clung
To me the victim, and the young girls went
With wailing and with tears. A solemn strain
The soft flutes sounded, as we went by night
To a wild headland, rock-based in the sea.

There to a sea-worn rock, upon the verge,
To some rude stanchions, high above my head,
They bound me. Out at sea, a black reef rose,
Washed by the constant surge, wherein a cave
Sheltered deep down the monster. The sad queen
Would scarcely leave me, though the priests shrunk back
In terror. At the last, with a long kiss,
Swooning they bore her upwards. All my robe
Fell from my lifted arms, and left displayed
The virgin treasures of my breasts; and then
The white procession through the moonlight streamed

Upwards, and soon their soft flutes sounded low
Upon the high lawns, leaving me alone.

There stood I in the moonlight, left alone
Against the sea-worn rock. Hardly I knew,
Seeing only the bright moon and summer sea,
Which gently heaved and surged, and kissed the ledge
With smooth warm tides, what fate was mine. I seemed,
Soothed by the quiet, to be resting still
Within my maiden chamber, and to watch
The moonlight thro' my lattice, then again
Fear came, and then the pride of sacrifice
Filled me, as on the high cliff lawns I heard
The wailing cries, the chanted liturgies,
And knew me bound forsaken to the rock,
And saw the monster haunted depths of sea.

So all night long upon the sandy shores

I heard the hollow murmur of the wave,
And all night long the hidden sea caves made
A ghostly echo; and the sea birds mewed
Around me; once I heard a mocking laugh,
As of some scornful Nereid, once the sea
Broke louder on the scarpèd reefs, and ebbed
As if the monster coming; but again
He came not, and the dead moon sank, and still
Only upon the cliffs the wails, the chants,
And I forsaken on my sea-worn rock,
And lo, the monster haunted depths of sea.

Till at the dead dark hour before the dawn,
When sick men die, and scarcely fear itself
Bore up my weary eyelids, a great surge
Burst on the rock, and slowly, as it seemed,
The sea sucked downward to its depths, laid bare
The hidden reefs, and then before my eyes—

Oh, horrible! a huge and loathsome snake
Lifted his dreadful crest and scaly sides
Above the wave, in bulk and length so large,
Coil after hideous coil, that scarce the eye
Could measure its full horror; the great jaws
Dropped as with gore; the large and furious eyes
Were fired with blood and lust. Nearer he came,
And slowly, with a devilish glare, drew near.
Till his hot fœtor choked me, and his tongue,
Forked horribly within his poisonous jaws,
Played lightning-like around me; for awhile
I swooned, and when I knew my life again,
Death's bitterness was past.

Then with a bound
Leaped up the hot red sun above the sea,
And lit the horrid fulgour of his scales,
And struck upon the rock; and as I turned
My head in the last agony of death,

From the unpolluted meads, where never herd
Drives his white flock, nor ever scythe has come,
But the bee sails upon unfettered wing
Over the spring-like lawns, and Purity
Waters them with soft dews;* and yet he showed
Of all his peers most manly—heart and soul
A very man, tender and true, and strong
And pitiful, and in his limbs and mien
Fair as Apollo's self.

It was at first
In Trœzen that I saw him, when he came
To greet his sire. Amid the crowd of youths
He showed a Prince indeed; yet knew I not
Whom 'twas I saw, nor that I held the place
Which was his mother's, only from the throng
Love, with a barbed dart aiming, pierced my heart
Ere yet I knew what ailed me. Every glance

* Euripides, "Hippolytus," lines 70–78.

Fired me; the youthful grace, the tall straight limbs,
The swelling sinewy arms, the large dark eyes
Tender yet full of passion, the thick locks
Tossed from his brow, the lip and cheek which bore
The down of early manhood, seemed to feed
My heart with short-lived joy.
For when he stood
Forth from the throng and knelt before his sire,
Then raised his eyes to mine, I felt the curse
Of Aphrodité burn me, as it burned
My mother before me, and I dared not meet
His innocent, frank young eyes.
Said I then young?
Ay, but not young as mine. But I had known
The secret things of life, which age the soul
In a moment, writing on its front their mark
Too early ripe; and he was innocent,
My spouse in fitted years, within whose arms

When we were wedded, fades and vanishes
Into the irrecoverable past?
Nay, 'tis not strange. Always the memory
Of overwhelming perils or great joys
Avoided or enjoyed, writes its own trace,
With such deep characters upon our lives,
That all the rest are blotted. In this place,
Where is not action, thought, or count of time,
It is not weary as it were on earth,
To dwell on these old memories. Time is born
Of dawns and sunsets, days that wax and wane
And stamp themselves upon the soft and yielding face
Of fleeting human life; but here there is
Morning nor evening, act nor suffering,
But only one unchanging present holds
Our being suspended. Once indeed I mind,
Or centuries ago or yesterday,
There came among us one who was divine,

Not as our gods, joyous and breathing strength
And careless life, but crowned with a new crown
Of suffering, and a great light came with him,
And with him he brought Time and a new sense
Of dim, long-vanished days, and since he passed
I seem to see new meaning in my life,
And all the deeds I spoke of. Evermore
The young life comes, bound to the cruel rocks
Alone. Before it the unfathomed sea
Smiles, filled with monstrous growths that wait to take
Its innocence. Far off the voice and hand
Of love kneel by in agony, and entreat
The seeming careless gods. Still when the deep
Is smoothest, lo, the deadly fangs and coils
Are nigh, to smite with death. And o'er the crags
Of duty, like a sudden sunbeam, springs
Some golden soul half mortal, half divine,
Heaven sent, and breaks the chain, and evermore

For sacrifice they die, through sacrifice
They live and are for others, and no grief
That smites the humblest but reverberates
Thro' all the close-set files of time, and takes
The princely soul that from its royal towers
Looks down and sees the sorrow.

Sir, farewell!
If thou should'st meet my children on the earth
Or here, for maybe it is long ago
Since I and they were living, say to them
I only muse a little here, and wait
The waking."

And her lifted arms sank down
Upon her knees, and as I passed I saw
Her seated with rapt eyes, and on her lips
A smile as of a saint.

And then I saw'
A manly hunter pace along the lea,
His bow upon his shoulder, and his spear
Poised idly in his hand: the face and form
Of vigorous youth; but in the full brown eyes
A timorous gaze as of a hunted hart,
Brute-like, yet human still, even as the Faun
Of old, the dumb brute passing into man,
And dowered with double nature. As he came
I seemed to question of his fate, and he
Answered me thus:

"'Twas one hot afternoon
That I, a hunter, wearied with my day,
Heard my hounds baying fainter on the hills,
Led by the flying hart; and when the sound
Faded and all was still, I turned to seek,
O'ercome by heat and thirst, a little glade,
Deep in the cool recesses of the wood,
Where the cold crystal of a mossy pool
Rose to the flowery marge, and gave again
The soft green lawn where ofttimes, overspent,
I lay upon the grass and eager bathed
My limbs in the clear lymph.
But as I neared
The hollow, sudden through the leaves I saw
A throng of wood-nymphs fair, sporting undraped
Round one, a goddess. She with timid hand
Loosened her zone, and glancing round let fall
Her robe from neck and bosom, pure and bright,

(For it was Dian's self: I saw none else)
As when she frees her from a fleece of cloud
And swims along the deep blue sea of heaven
On sweet June nights. Silent awhile I stood,
Rooted with awe, and fain had turned to fly,
But feared by careless footstep to affright
Those chaste cold eyes. Great awe and reverence
Held me, and fear; then Love with passing wing
Fanned me, and held my eyes, and checked my breath,
Signing 'Beware!'
So for a time I watched,
Breathless as one a brooding nightmare holds,
Who fleeth some great fear, yet fleeth not,
Till the last flutter of lawn, and veil no more
Obscured, and all the beauty of my dreams
Assailed my sense; but ere I raised my eyes,
As one who fain would look and see the sun,
The first glance dazed my brain. Only I knew

The perfect outline flow in tender curves,
To break in double beauties; only a haze
Of creamy white, dimple, and deep divine:
And then no more. For lo! a sudden chill,
And such thick mist as shuts the hills at eve,
Oppressed me gazing; and a heaven-sent shame,
An awe, a fear, a reverence for the unknown,
Froze all the springs of will and left me cold,
And blinded all the longings of my eyes,
Leaving such dim reflection still as mocks
Him who has looked on a great light, and keeps
On his closed eyes the image. Presently,
Hidden as Eve hid her, 'mid the dewy groves.
Of Paradise, my fainting soul renewed,
And straight, the innocent brute within the man
Bore on me, and with half-averted gaze
I gazed upon the secret.

As I looked

A radiance white, as beamed the frosty moon
On the mad boy and slew him, beamed on me;
Made chill my pulses, checked my life and heat;
Transformed me, withered all my soul, and left
My being burnt out. For lo! the dreadful eyes
Of Godhead met my gaze, and through the mask
And thick disguise of sense, as through a wood,
Pierced to my life. Then suddenly I knew
An altered nature, touched by no desire
For that which showed so lovely, but declined
To lower levels. Nought of fear or awe,
Nothing of love was mine. Wide-eyed I gazed,
But saw no spiritual beam to blight
My brain with too much beauty, no undraped
And awful majesty; only a brute,
Dumb charm, like that which draws the brute to it,
Unknowing it is drawn. So gradually
I knew a dull content o'ercloud my sense,

And unabashed I gazed, like that dumb bird
Which thinks no thought and speaks no word, yet fronts
The sun that blinded Homer—all my fear
Sunk with my shame, in a base happiness.

But as I gazed, and careless turned and passed
Through the thick wood, forgetting what had been,
And thinking thoughts no longer, swift there came
A mortal terror: voices that I knew.
My own hounds' bayings that I loved before,
As with them often o'er the purple hills
I chased the flying hart from slope to slope,
Before the slow sun climbed the Eastern peaks,
Until the swift sun smote the Western plain;
Whom often I had cheered by voice and word,
Whom often I had checked with hand and thong;—
Grim followers, like the passions, firing me;
True servants, like the strong nerves, urging me

On many a fruitless chase, to find and take
Some too swift-fleeting beauty; faithful feet
And tongues, obedient always: these I knew,
Clothed with a new-born force and vaster grown,
And stronger than their master; and I thought,
What if they tare me with their jaws, nor knew
That once I ruled them,—brute pursuing brute,
And I the quarry? Then I turned and fled,—
If it was I indeed that feared and fled—
Down the long glades, and through the tangled brakes,
Where scarce the sunlight pierced; fled on and on,
And panted, self-pursued. But evermore
The dissonant music which I knew so sweet,
When on the windy hills, and vales deep-set,
And whispering pines it came; now far, now near,
As from my rushing steed I leant and cheered
With voice and horn the chase, this brought to me
Fear of I knew not what, which bade me fly,

Fly always, fly; but when my heart stood still,
And all my limbs were stiffened as I fled,
Just as the white moon ghost-like climbed the sky,
Nearer they came and nearer, baying loud,
With bloodshot eyes and red jaws dripping foam;
And when I strove to check their savagery,
Speaking with words; no voice articulate came,
Only a dumb, low bleat. Then all the throng
Leapt swift on me, and tore me as I lay,
And left me man again.

Wherefore I walk
Along these dim fields peopled with the ghosts
Of heroes who have left the ways of earth
For this faint ghost of them. Sometimes I think,
Pondering on what has been, that all my days
Were shadows, all my life an allegory;
And, though I know sometimes some fainter gleam
Of the old beauty move me, and sometimes

Some beat of the old pulses, that my life,
For ever hurrying on in hot pursuit,
To fall at length self-slain, was but a tale
Writ large by Zeus upon a mortal life,
Writ large, and yet a riddle; for sometimes
I read its meaning thus: Life is a chase,
And man the hunter, always following on,
With hounds of rushing thought or fiery sense,
Some hidden truth or beauty, fleeting still
For ever through the thick-leaved coverts vast
And wind-worn wolds of life. And if we turn
A moment from the hot pursuit to seize
Some chance-brought sweetness, other than the search
To which our life is set,—some dalliance,
Some outward shape of Art, some lower love,
Some charm of wealth and sleek content and home,—
Then, if we check an instant, the swift chase
Of fierce untempered energies which pursue,

With jaws unsated and a thirst for life,
Bears down on us with clanging shock, and whelms
Our prize and us in ruin.

And sometimes
I seem to myself a thinker, who at last,
By some dark lake of thought unknown, unseen,
Amid the chase and capture of low ends,
Comes one day on some perfect truth, and looks
Till the fair vision blinds him heart and brain,
And, all his former nature hurrying on,
The strong brute forces and unchecked desires,
Finding him bound and speechless, think him now
No more their master, but some soulless thing;
And leap on him, and seize him, and possess
His life, till through death's gate he pass to life,
And his own ghost revives. But looks no more
Upon the truth unveiled, but through a cloud
Of creed and faith and longing, which shall change

One day to perfect knowledge.

But whoe'er

Shall read the riddle of my life, I walk

In this dim land amid dim ghosts of kings,

As one day thou shalt; meantime, fare thou well."

Then passed he; and I marked him slowly go

Along the winding ways of that weird land,

And vanish in a wood.

And next I knew

A woman perfect as a young man's dream,

And breathing as it seemed the old sweet air

Of the fair days of old, when man was young

And life an Epic. Round the lips a smile

Subtle and deep and sweet as hers who looks
From the old painter's canvas, and derides
Life and the riddle of things, the aimless strife,
The folly of Love, as who has proved it all,
Enjoyed and suffered; in the lovely eyes
A weary look, no other than the gaze
Which ofttimes as the rapid chariot whirls,
And ofttimes by the glaring midnight streets,
Gleams out and chills our thought; and yet not guilt
Nor sorrow was it, only weariness,
No more, and still most lovely. As I named
Her name in haste, she looked with half surprise,
And thus she seemed to speak.

"What? Dost thou know,
Thou too, the fatal glances which beguiled
Those strong rude chiefs of old? Has not the gloom
Of this dim land withdrawn from out mine eyes
The glamour which once filled them? Does my cheek

Retain the round of youth and still defy
The wear of immemorial centuries?
And this low voice, long silent, keeps it still
The music of old time? Aye, in thine eyes
I read it, and within thine eyes I see
Thou knowest me, and the story of my life
Sung by the blind old bard when I was dead,
And all my lovers dust. I know thee not,
Thee nor thy gods, yet would I soothly swear
I was not all to blame for what has been,
The long fight, the swift death, the woes, the tears,
The brave lives spent, the humble homes uptorn
To gain one poor fair face. It was not I
That curved these lips into this subtle smile,
Or gave these eyes their fire, nor yet made round
This supple frame. It was not I, but Love,
Love mirroring himself in all things fair,
Love that projects himself upon a life,

And dotes on his own image.

Ah ! the days,
The weary years of Love and feasts and gold,
The hurried flights, the din of clattering hoofs
At midnight, when the heroes dared for me,
And bore me o'er the hills, the swift pursuits
Baffled and lost, or when from isle to isle
The high-oared galley spread its wings and rose
Over the swelling surges; and I saw,
Time after time, the scarce familiar town,
The sharp-cut hills, the well-loved palaces,
The gleaming temples fade, and all for me,
Me the dead prize, the shell, the soulless ghost,
The husk of a true woman; the fond words
Wasted on careless ears, that seemed to hear,
Of love to me unloving; the rich feasts,
The silken dalliance and soft luxury,
The fair observance and high reverence

For me who cared not, to whatever land
My kingly lover snatched me. I have known
How small a fence Love sets between the king
And the strong hind, who breeds his brood, and dies
Upon the field he tills. I have exchanged
People for people, crown for glittering crown,
Through every change a queen, and held my state
Hateful, and sickened in my soul to lie
On silken cushions to the lutes' soft sound,
When on the wasted fields the clang of arms
Rang, and the foemen perished, and swift death,
Hunger, and plague, and every form of woe
Vexed all the land for me. I have heard the curse
Unspoken, when the wife widowed for me
Clasped to her heart her orphans starved for me;
As I swept proudly by. I have prayed the gods,
Hating my own fair face which wrought such woe,
Some plague divine might light on it and leave

My curse a ruin. Yet I think indeed
They had not cursed but pitied, those true wives
Who mourned their humble lords, and straining felt
The innocent thrill which swells the mother's heart
Who clasps her growing boy, had they but known
The lifeless life, the pain of hypocrite smiles,
The dead load of caresses simulated,
When Love stands shuddering by to see his fires
Lit for the shrine of gold. What if they knew
The weariness of loveless love which grew
And, through the jealous palace portals, seized
The caged unloving woman, sick of toys,
Sick of her gilded chains, her ease, herself,
Till for sheer weariness she rushed to meet
Some new unloved seducer. What if they knew
No childish loving hands, or, worse than all,
Had borne them sullen to a sire unloved,
And left them without sorrow. I might have been,

I too, a loving mother and chaste wife,
Had Fate so willed.
For I remember well
How one day straying from my father's halls
Seeking anemones and violets,
A girl in spring-time, when the heart makes spring
Within the budding bosom, that I came
Of a sudden through a wood upon a bay,
A little sunny land-locked bay, whose banks
Sloped gently downward to the yellow sand,
Where the blue wave creamed soft with fairy foam
And oft the Nereids sported. As I strayed
Singing, with fresh-pulled violets in my hair
And bosom, and my hands were full of flowers,
I came upon a little milk-white lamb,
And took it in my arms and fondled it,
And wreathed its neck with flowers, and sang to it
And kissed it, and the spring was in my life,

And I was glad.

And when I raised my eyes,
Behold, a youthful shepherd with his crook
Stood by me and regarded as I lay,
Tall, fair, with clustering curls, and front that wore
A budding manhood; as I looked a fear
Came o'er me, lest he were some youthful god
Disguised in shape of man, so fair he was;
But when he spoke, the kindly voice was full
Of manhood, and the large eyes full of fire
Drew me without a word, and all the flowers
Fell from me, and the little milk-white lamb
Strayed through the brake, and took with it the white
Fair years of childhood. Time fulfilled my being
With passion like a cup, and with one kiss
Left me a woman.

Ah! the lovely days,
When on the warm bank crowned with flowers we sate

And thought no harm, and his thin reed pipe made
Low music, and no witness of our love
Intruded, but the tinkle of the flock
Came from the hill, and 'neath the odorous shade
We dreamed away the day, and watched the waves
Steal shoreward, and beyond the sylvan capes
The innumerable laughter of the sea!

Ah youth and love! So passed the happy days
Till twilight, and I stole as in a dream
Homeward, and lived as in a happy dream,
And when they spoke answered as in a dream,
And through the darkness saw, as in a glass,
The happy, happy day, and thrilled and glowed
And kept my love in dreams, and longed for day,
And scarcely stayed for hunger, and with morn
Stole eager to the little wood, and fed
My life with kisses. Ah! the joyous days

Of innocence, when Love was Queen in heaven,
And nature unreproved! Break they then still
Those azure circles on a golden shore?
Is there a spot upon the older earth
Where spite of all, gray wisdom, and new gods,
Young lovers dream within each other's arms
Silent, by shadowy grove, or sunlit sea?

Ah days too fair to last! There came a night
When I lay longing for my love, and heard
Sudden the clang of hoofs, the broken doors,
The clash of swords, the shouts, the groans, the stain
Of red upon the marble, the fixed gaze
Of dead and dying eyes,—this was the time
When first I looked on death,—and when I woke
From my deep swoon, I knew the night air cool
Upon my brow, and the cold stars look down,
As swift we galloped o'er the darkling plain;

And saw the chill sea glimpses slowly wake,
With arms unknown around me. When the dawn
Broke swift, we panted on the pathless steeps,
And so by plain and mountain till we came
To Athens, where they kept me till I grew
Fairer with every year, and many wooed,
Heroes and chieftains, but I loved not one.

And then the avengers came and snatched me back
To Sparta. All the dark high-crested chiefs
Of Argos wooed me, striving king with king
For one fair foolish face, nor knew I kept
No heart to give them. Yet since I was grown
Weary of honeyed words and suit of love,
I wedded a brave chief, dauntless and true.
But what cared I? I could not prize at all
His honest service. I had grown so tired
Of loving and of love, that when they brought

News that the fairest shepherd on the hills,
Having done himself to death for his lost love,
Lay, like a lovely statue, cold and white
Upon the golden sand, I hardly knew
More than a passing pang. Love, like a flower,
Love, springing up too tall in a young heart,
The growth of morning, Life's too scorching sun
Had withered long ere noon. Love, like a flame
On his own altar offering up my heart,
Had burnt my being to ashes.

Was it love
That drew me then to Paris? He was fair,
I grant you, fairer than a summer morn,
Fair with a woman's fairness, yet in arms
A hero, but he never had my heart,
It was not he seduced me, but the thirst
For freedom, if in more than thought I erred,
And was not rapt but willing. For my child,

Borne to an unloved father, loved me not,
The fresh sea called, the galleys plunged, and I
Fled willing from my prison and the pain
Of undesired caresses, and the wind
Was fair, and on the third day as we sailed,
My heart was glad within me when I saw
The towers of Ilium rise beyond the wave.

Ah, the long years, the melancholy years,
The miserable melancholy years!
For soon the new grew old, and then I grew
Weary of him, of all, of pomp and state
And novel splendour, yet at times I knew
Some thrill of pride within me as I saw
From those high walls, a prisoner and a foe,
The swift ships flock at anchor in the bay,
The hasty landing and the flash of arms,
The lines of royal tents upon the plain,

The close-shut gates, the chivalry within
Issuing in all its pride to meet the shock
Of the bold chiefs without; so year by year
The haughty challenge by the heralds sent
Went forth, and I with a divided heart
Saw victory incline now here, now there,
And helpless marked the Argive chiefs I knew,
The spouse I left, the princely loves of old,
Now with each other strive, and now with Troy:
The brave pomp of the morn, the fair strong limbs,
The glittering panoply, the bold young hearts,
Athirst for fame of war, and with the night
The broken spear, the shattered helm, the plume
Dyed red with blood, the ghastly dying face,
And nerveless limbs laid lifeless. And I knew
The stainless Hector whom I could have loved,
But that a happy love made blind his eyes
To all my baleful beauty; fallen and dragged

His noble, manly head upon the sand
By young Achilles' chariot; him in turn
Fallen and slain; my fair false Paris slain;
Plague, famine, battle, raging, now within
And now without, for many a weary year,
Summer and winter, till I loathed to live,
Who was indeed, as well they said, the Hell
Of men, and fleets, and cities. As I stood
Upon the walls, ofttimes a longing came,
Looking on rage, and fight, and blood, and death,
To end it all, and dash me down and die;
But no god helped me. Nay, one day I mind
I would entreat them. 'Pray you, lords, be men.
What fatal charm is this which Até gives
To one poor foolish face? Be strong, and turn
In peace, forget this glamour, get you home
With all your fleets and armies, to the land
I love no longer, where your faithful wives

Pine widowed of their lords, and your young boys
Grow wild to manhood. I have nought to give,
Nor heart, nor prize of love for any man,
Nor recompense. I am the ghost alone
Of the fair girl ye knew; she still abides
If she still lives, and is not wholly dead,
Stretched on a flowery bank upon the sea
In fair heroic Argos. Leave this form
That is no other than the outward shell
Of a once loving woman.'

As I spoke,
My pity fired my eyes and flushed my cheek
With some soft charm; and as I spread my hands,
The purple, glancing down a little, left
The marble of my breasts and one pink bud
Upon the gleaming snows. And as I looked
With a mixed pride and terror, I beheld
The brute rise up within them, and my words

Fall barren on them. So I sat apart,
Nor ever more looked forth, while every day
Brought its own woe.
The melancholy years,
The miserable melancholy years,
Crept onward till the midnight terror came,
And by the glare of burning streets I saw
Palace and temple reel in ruin and fall,
And the long-baffled legions, bursting in
Through gate and bastion, blunted sword and spear
With unresisted slaughter. From my tower
I saw the good old king; his kindly eyes
In agony, and all his reverend hairs
Dabbled with blood, as the fierce foeman thrust
And stabbed him as he lay; the youths, the girls,
Whom day by day I knew, their silken ease
And royal luxury changed to blood and tears,
Haled forth to death or worse. Then a great hate

Of life and the gods seized me, and I rose
And rushed among them, crying, 'See, 'tis I,
I who have brought this evil! Kill me! kill
The fury that is I, yet is not I!
And let my soul go outward through the wound
Made clean by blood to Hades! Let me die,
Not these who did no wrong!' But not a hand
Was raised, and all shrank backward as afraid,
As from a goddess, then I swooned and fell
And knew no more, and when I woke I felt
My husband's arms around me, and the wind
Blew fair for Greece, and the beaked galley plunged;
And where the towers of Ilium rose of old,
A pall of smoke above a glare of fire.

What then in the near future?

Ten long years
Change youth and love to that deep summer-time

When the full noisy current of our lives
Creeps dumb through wealth of flowers. I think I knew
Somewhat of peace at last, with my good Lord
Who loved too much, to palter with the past,
Flushed with the present. Young Hermione
Had grown from child to woman. She was wed;
And was not I her mother? At the pomp
Of solemn nuptials and requited love,
I prayed she might be happy, happier far
Than ever I was; so in tranquil ease
I lived a queen long time, and because wealth
And high observance can make sweet our days
When youth's swift joy is past, I did requite
With what I might, not love, the kindly care
Of him I loved not; pomps and robes of price
And chariots held me; but when Fate cut short
His life and love, his sons who were not mine
Reigned in his stead, and hated me and mine.

And knowing I was friendless, I sailed forth
Once more across the sea, seeking for rest
And shelter. Still I knew that in my eyes
Love dwelt, and all the baleful charm of old
Blazed as of yore, scarce dimmed as yet by time:
I saw it in the mirror of the sea,
I saw it in the youthful seamen's eyes,
And was half proud again I had such power
Who now kept nothing else. So one fair day,
Behold, a sweet fair isle blushed like a rose
Upon the summer sea, there my swift ship
Cast anchor, and they told me it was Rhodes.

There, in a little wood above the sea,
Like that dear wood of yore, I wandered forth
Alone, and all my seamen were apart,
And I, alone; when at the close of day
I knew myself surrounded by strange churls

With angry eyes, and one who ordered them,
A woman, whom I knew not, but who walked
In mien and garb a queen. She, with the fire
Of hate within her eyes, 'Quick, bind her, men!
I know her; bind her fast!' Then to the trunk
Of a tall plane they bound me with rude cords
That cut my arms. And meantime, far below,
The sun was gilding fair with dying rays
Isle after isle and purple wastes of sea.

And then she signed to them, and all withdrew
Among the woods and left us, face to face,
Two women. Ere I spoke, 'I know,' she said,
'I know that evil fairness. This it was,
Or ever he had come across my life,
That made him cold to me, who had my love
And left me half a heart. If all my life
Of wedlock was but half a life, what fiend

Came 'twixt my love and me, but that fair face?
What left his children orphans, but that face?
And me a widow? Fiend! I have thee now;
Thou hast not long to live. I will requite
Thy murders; yet, oh fiend! that art so fair,
Were it not haply better to deface
Thy fatal loveliness, and leave thee bare
Of all thy baleful power? And yet I doubt,
And looking on thy face I doubt the more,
Lest all thy dower of fairness be the gift
Of Aphrodité, and I fear to fight
Against the immortal gods.'

Even with the word,
And she relenting, all the riddle of life
Flashed through me, and the inextricable coil
Of Being, and the immeasurable depths
And irony of fate, burst on my thought

And left me smiling in the eyes of death,
With this deep smile thou seëst. Then with a shriek
The woman leapt on me, and with blind rage
Strangled my life. And when she had done the deed
She swooned, and those her followers hasting back
Fell prone upon their knees before the corpse
As to a goddess. Then one went and brought
A sculptor, and within a jewelled shrine
They set me in white marble, bound to a tree
Of marble. And they came and knelt to me,
Young men and maidens, through the long-drawn years,
While the old gods bore sway, but I was here,
And now they kneel no longer, for the world
Has gone from beauty.

But I think, indeed,
They well might worship still, for never yet
Was any thought or thing of beauty born
Except with suffering. That poor wretch who thought

I injured her, stealing the foolish heart ··
That she prized but I could not, what knew she
Of that I suffered? She had loved her love,
Though unrequited, and had borne to him
Children who loved her. What if she had been
Loved yet unloving: all the fire of love
Burnt out before love's time in one brief blaze
Of passion. Ah, poor fool! I pity her,
Being blest and yet unthankful, and forgive,
Now that she is a ghost as I, the hand
Which loosed my load of life. For scarce indeed
Could any god who cares for mortal men
Have ever kept me happy. I had tired
Of simple loving, doubtless, as I tired
Of splendour and being loved. There be some souls
For which love is enough, and who can bear
From youth to age, from chestnut locks to gray,
The load of common, uneventful life

And penury. But I was not of these;
I know not now, if it were best indeed
That I had reared my simple shepherd brood,
And lived and died unknown in some poor hut
Among the Argive hills, or lived a queen
As I did, knowing every day that dawned
Some high emprise and glorious, and in death
To fill the world with song. Not the same meed
The gods mete out for all, or She, the dread
Necessity, who rules both gods and men,
Some to dishonour, some to honour moulds,
To happiness some, some to unhappiness.
We are what Zeus has made us, discords playing
In the great music, but the harmony
Is sweeter for them, and the great spheres ring
In one accordant hymn.
But thou, if e'er
There come a daughter of thy love, oh pray

To all thy gods, lest haply they should mar
Her life with too great beauty ! "
So she ceased,
The fairest woman that the poet's dream
Or artist hand has fashioned. All the gloom
Seemed lightened round her, and I heard the sound
Of her melodious voice when all was still,
And the dim twilight took her.

Next there came
Two who together walked : one with a lyre
Of gold, which gave no sound ; the other hung
Upon his breast, and closely clung to him,
Spent in a tender longing. As they came,

I heard her gentle voice recounting o'er
Some ancient tale, and these the words she said :

" Dear voice and lyre now silent, which I heard
Across yon sullen river, bringing to me
All my old life, and he, the ferryman,
Heard and obeyed, and the grim monster heard
And fawned on you. Joyous thou cam'st and free
Like a white sunbeam from the dear bright earth,
Where suns shone clear, and moons beamed bright, and streams
Laughed with a rippling music (nor as here
The dumb stream stole, the veiled sky slept, the fields
Were lost in twilight). Like a morning breeze,
Which blows in summer from the gates of dawn
Across the fields of spice, and wakes to life
Their slumbering perfume, through this silent land
Of whispering voices and of half-closed eyes,

Where scarce a footstep sounds, nor any strain
Of earthly song, thou cam'st; and suddenly
The pale cheeks flushed a little, the murmured words
Rose to a faint, thin treble; the throng of ghosts
Pacing along the sunless ways and still,
Felt a new life. Thou camest, dear, and straight
The dull cold river broke in sparkling foam,
The pale and scentless flowers grew perfumed; last
To the dim chamber, where with the sad queen
I sat in gloom, and silently inwove
Dead wreaths of amaranths; thy music came
Laden with life, and I, who seemed to know
Not life's voice only, but my own, rose up,
Along the hollow pathways following
The sound which brought back earth and life and love,
And memory and longing. Yet I went
With half-reluctant footsteps, as of one
Whom passion draws, or some high fantasy,

Despite himself, because some subtle spell,
Part born of dread to cross that sullen stream
And its grim guardians, part of secret shame
Of the young airs and freshness of the earth,
Being that I was, enchained me.
Then at last,
From voice and lyre so high a strain arose
As trembled on the utter verge of being,
And thrilling, poured out life. Thus closelier drawn
I walked with thee, shut in by halcyon sound
And soft environments of harmony,
Beyond the ghostly gates, beyond the dim
Calm fields, where the beetle hummed and the pale owl
Stole noiseless from the copse, and the white blooms
Stretched thin for lack of sun: so fair a light
Born out of consonant sound environed me.
Nor looked I backward, as we seemed to move
To some high goal of thought and life and love,

Like twin birds flying fast with equal wing
Out of the night, to meet the coming sun
Above a sea. But on thy dear fair eyes,
The eyes that well I knew on the old earth,
I looked not, for with still averted gaze
Thou leddest, and I followed; for, indeed,
While that high strain was sounding, I was rapt
In faith and a high courage, driving out
All doubt and discontent and womanish fear,
Nay, even my love itself. But when awhile
It sunk a little, or seemed to sink and fall
To lower levels, seeing that use makes blunt
The too accustomed ear, straightway, desire
To look once more on thy recovered eyes
Seized me, and oft I called with piteous voice,
Beseeching thee to turn. But thou long time
Wert even as one who heard not, with grave sigh
And waving hand denying. Finally,

When now we neared the stream, on whose far shore
Lay life, great terror took me, and I shrieked
Thy name, as in despair. Then thou, as one
Who knows him set in some great jeopardy,
A swift death fronting him on either hand,
Didst slowly turning gaze; and lo! I saw
Thine eyes grown awful, life that looked on death,
Clear purity on dark and cankered sin,
The immortal on corruption,—not the eyes
That erst I knew in life, but dreadfuller;
And stranger; as I looked, I seemed to swoon,
Some blind force whirled me back, and when I woke
I saw thee vanish in the middle stream,
A speck on the dull waters, taking with thee
My life, and leaving Love with me. But I
Not for myself bewail, but all for thee,
Who, but for me, wert now among the stars
With thy great Lord; I sitting at thy feet.

But now the fierce and unrestrained band
Of passions woman-natured, finding thee
Scornful of love within thy Thracian cave,
With blind rage falling on thee, tore thy limbs,
And left thee to the Muses' sepulture,
While thy soul dwells in Hades; but I wail
My weakness always, who for Love destroyed
The life that was my Love. I prithee, dear,
Forgive me if thou canst, who has lost heaven
To save a loving woman."

He with voice
Sweeter than any mortal melody,
And plaintive as the music that is made
By the Æolian strings, or the sad bird
That sings of summer nights:

"Eurydice,
Dear love, be comforted; not once alone
That which thou mournest haps, but day by day

Some lonely soul, which walks apart and feeds
On high hill pastures, far from the herds of men,
Comes to the low fat fields, and sunny vales
Joyous with fruits and flowers, and the white arms
Of laughing love; and there awhile he stays
Content, forgetting all the joys he knew,
When first the morning breaks upon the hills,
And the keen air breathes from the Eastern gates
Like a pure draught of wine; forgetting all
The strains which float, as from a nearer heaven,
To him who treads at dawn the untrodden snows,
While all the warm world sleeps;—forgetting these
And all things that have been. And if he gain
To raise to his own heights the simpler souls
That dwell upon the plains, the untutored thought,
The museless lives, the unawakened brain
That yet might soar, then is he blest indeed.
But if he fail, then, leaving love behind,

The wider love of the race, the closer love
Of some congenial soul, he turns again
To the old difficult steeps, and there alone
Dwells, till the widowed passions of his heart
Tear him and rend his soul, and drive him down
To the low plains he left. And there he dwells,
Missing the sky, dearest, and the white peaks,
And the light air of old; but in their stead
Finding the soft sweet sun of the vale, the clouds
Which veil the heavens indeed, but give the rains
That feed the streams of life and make earth green,
And bring at last the harvest. So I walk
In this dim land content with thee, O Love,
Untouched by any yearning of regret
For those old days; nor that the lyre which made
Erewhile such potent music now is dumb;
Nor that the voice which once could move the earth
(Zeus speaking through it), speaks in household words

Of homely love : Love is enough for me
With thee, O dearest; and perchance at last,
Zeus willing, this dumb lyre and whispered voice
Shall wake, by Love inspired, to such high note
As mounts above the stars, and swelling takes
Our souls to highest heaven."

Then he stooped,
And, folded in one long embrace, they went
And faded in the darkness.

Then I chanced
On a fair woman, whose sad eyes were full
Of a fixed self-reproach, like his who knows
Himself the fountain of his grief, and pines
With self-inflicted sorrow. As I spoke
Enquiring of her grief, she answered thus :

"Stranger, thou seest of all the shades below
The most unhappy. Others sought their love
In death, and found it, dying, but for me
The death that took me, took from me my love,
And left me comfortless. No crime was mine,
Like those dark wicked women who have slain
Their Lords for lust or anger, whom the dread
Propitious Ones within the pit below
Punish and purge of sin; only unfaith,
If haply want of faith be not a crime
Blacker than murder, when we fail to trust
One worthy of all faith, and folly bring
No harder recompense than comes of scorn
And loathing of itself.
Ah, fool, fool, fool,
Who didst mistrust thy love, who was the best,
And truest, manliest soul with whom the gods

Have ever blest the earth. So brave, so strong,
Fired with such burning hate of powerful wrong.
So loving of the race, so swift to raise
The fearless arm and mighty club, and smite
All monstrous growths with ruin—Zeus himself
Showed scarce more mighty—and yet was the while
A very man, not cast in mould too fine
For human love, but ofttimes snared and caught
By womanish wiles, fast held within the net
His passions wove. Oh, it was grand to hear
Of how he went, the champion of his race,
Mighty in war, mighty in love, now bent
To more than human tasks, now lapt in ease,
Now suffering, now enjoying. Strong, vast soul,
Tuned to heroic deeds, and set on high
Above the range of common petty sins—
Too high to mate with an unequal soul,
Too full of striving for contented days.

Ah me, how well I mind the day, the cause
Of all our ills! I was a happy bride
When that dark Até which pursues the steps
Of heroes—innocent blood-guiltiness—
Drove us to exile, and I joyed to be
His own, and share his pain. To a strong stream
Fleeing we came, where a rough ferryman
Waited, more brute than man. My hero plunged
Into the depths and battled with their flow,
And with great labour gained the side, and bade
The monster row me to him. But with lust
And brutal cunning in his eyes, the thing
Seized me and turned to fly with me, when swift
An arrow hissed from the unerring bow,
Pierced him, and loosed his grasp. Then as his eyes
Grew glazed in death there came in them a gleam
Of what I know was hate, and he said, 'Take

This white robe. It is costly. See, my blood
Has stained it but a little. I did wrong:
I know it, and repent me. If there come
A time when he grows cold—for all the race
Of heroes wander, nor can any love
Fix theirs for long—take it and wrap him in it,
And he shall love again.' Then, with a strange
Deep look within his eyes, I turned from him
And left him half in pity, and I went
To meet my Lord, who rose from that fierce stream
Fair as a god.

Ah me, the weary days
We women live, spending our anxious souls
Consumed with jealous fancies, hungering still
For the beloved voice, and ears and eyes,
And hungering all in vain! For life is more
To youthful manhood than to sit with us
Before the hearth to watch the children's ways

And lead the life of petty household care
Which doth content us women. Day by day
I pined in Trachis for my love, while he,
Now in some warlike exploit busied, now
Fighting some monster, now at some fair court,
Resting awhile till some new enterprise
Called him, returned not. News of treacheries
Punished, friends succoured, dreadful monsters slain,
Came from him: always triumph, always fame,
And honour, and success, and reverence.
And sometimes, words of love for me who pined
For more than words, and would have gone to him
But that the toils of such high errantry
Asked more than woman's strength.
So the slow years
Vexed me alone in Trachis, set forlorn
In solitude, nor hearing at the gate
The frank and cheering voice, nor on the stair

The heavy tread, nor feeling the strong arm
Around me in the darkling night, when all
My being ran slow. Last, subtle whispers came
Of womanish wiles which kept my Lord from me,
And one who, young and fair, a fresh-grown life
And virgin, younger, fairer far, than I
When first he loved me, held him in the toils
Of scarce dissembled love. Not easily
Might I believe this evil, but at last
The oft-repeated malice finding me
Forlorn, and sitting imp-like at my ear,
Possessed me, and the fire of jealous love
Raged through my veins, not turned as yet to hate—
Too well I loved for that—but breeding in me
Unfaith in him. Love, setting him so high
And self so low, betrayed me, and I prayed,
Constrained to hold him false, the immortal gods
To make him love again.

But still he came not,
And still the maddening rumours worked, and still
'Fair, young, and a king's daughter,' the same words
Smote me and pierced me. Oh, there is no pain
In Hades—nay, nor deepest Hell itself,
Like that of jealous hearts, the torture-pain
Which racked my life so long.
Till one fair morn
There came a joyful message. 'He has come!
And at the shrine upon the promontory,
The fair white shrine upon the purple sea,
He waits to do his solemn sacrifice
To the immortal gods; and with him comes
A young maid beautiful as Dawn.'
Then I,
Mingling despair with love, rapt in deep joy
That he was come, plunged in the depths of hell
That she came too, bethought me of the robe

The Centaur gave me, and the words he spoke,
Forgetting the deep hatred in his eyes,
And all but love, and sent a messenger
Bidding him wear it for the sacrifice
To the immortals, knowing not at all
Whom Fate decreed the victim.
Shall my soul
Forget the agonized message which he sent,
Bidding me come? For that accursèd robe,
Stained with the poisonous accursèd blood,
Even in the midmost flush of sacrifice
Clung to him a devouring fire, and ate
The piteous flesh from his dear limbs, and stung
His great soft soul to madness. When I came,
Knowing it was my work, he bent on me,
Wise as a god through suffering and the near
Inevitable Death, so that no word
Of mine was needed, such a tender look

Of mild reproach as smote me. 'Couldst not thou
Trust me, who never loved as I love thee?
What need was there of magical arts to draw
The love that never wavered? I have lived
As he lives who through perilous paths must pass,
And lifelong trials, striving to keep down
The devil within him, born of too much strength
And sloth and vacuous days, by difficult toils,
Labours endured, and hard-fought fights with ill,
Now vanquished, now triumphant, and sometimes,
In intervals of too long labour, finding
His nature grown too strong for him, falls prone
Awhile a helpless prey, then once again
Rises and spurns his chains, and fares anew
Along the perilous ways. Dearest, I would
That thou wert wedded to some knight who stayed
At home within thy gates, and were content
To see thee happy. But for me the fierce

Rude energies of life, the mighty thews,
The god-sent hate of wrong, these drove me forth
To quench the thirst of battle. See, this maid,
This is the bride I destined for our son
Who grows to manhood. Do thou see to her
When I am dead, for soon I know again
The frenzy comes, and with it ceasing, death.
Go, therefore, ere I harm thee when my strength
Has lost its guidance. Thou wert rich in love,
Be now as rich in faith. Dear, for thy wrong
I do forgive thee.'

When I saw the glare
Of madness fire his eyes, and my ears heard
The groans the torture wrung from his great soul,
I fled with broken heart to the white shrine,
And knelt in prayer, but as I knelt I heard
Him groaning where he lay.

Then I who knew

There was no hope in god or man for me
Who had destroyed my Love, and with him slain
The champion of the suffering race of men;
And knowing that my soul, though innocent
Of blood, was guilty of unfaith and vile
Mistrust, and wrapt in weakness like a cloak,
And made the innocent tool of hate and wrong
Against all love and good; grown sick and filled
With hatred of myself, rose from my knees,
And went a little space apart, and found
A gnarled tree on the cliff, and with my scarf
Strangling myself, swung lifeless.

But in death
I found him not. For, building a vast pile
Of scented woods on Oeta, as they tell,
My hero with his own hand lighted it,
And when the mighty pyre flamed far and wide
Over all lands and seas, he climbed on it

And laid him down to die; but pitying Zeus,
Before the swift flames reached him, in a cloud
Descending, snatched the strong brave soul to heaven,
And set him mid the stars.

Wherefore am I
Of all the blameless shades within this place
The most unhappy, if of blame, indeed,
I have no load. For what is sin itself,
But error when we miss the road which leads
Up to the gate of heaven? Ignorance!
What if we be the cause of ignorance?
Being blind who might have seen! Yet do I know
But self-inflicted pain, nor stain there is
Upon my soul such as they bear who know
The dreadful scourge with which the stern judge still
Lashes their sins. I am forgiven, I know,
Who loved so much, and one day, if Zeus will,
I shall go free from hence, and join my Lord,

And be with him again."

And straight I seemed,
Passing, to look upon some scarce-spent life,
Which knows to-day the irony of Fate
In self-inflicted pain.

Together clung
The ghosts whom next I saw, bound three in one
By some invisible bond. A sire, with port
God-like as Zeus, to whom on either hand
A tender stripling clung. I knew them well,
As all men know them. One fair youth spake low:
"Father, it does not pain me now, to be

Drawn close to thee, and by a double band,
With this my brother." And the other: "Nay,
Nor me, O father; but I bless the chain
Which binds our souls in union. If some trace
Of pain still linger, heed it not—'tis past:
Still let us cling to thee."

He with a look
Of a great tenderness, upon his sons
Looked with the father's gaze, that is so far
More sweet, and sad, and tender, than the gaze
Of mothers,—now on this one, now on that,
Regarding them. "Dear sons, whom on the earth
I loved and cherished, it was hard to watch
Your pain; but now 'tis over, and we stand
For ever, through all future days of time,
Symbols of patient suffering undeserved,
Ended and vanquished. Yet sad memory still
Brings back our time of trial.

For the day
Broke fair when I, the dread Poseidon's priest—
Joyous because the unholy strife was done,
And seeing the blue waters now left free
Of hostile keels, save where upon the verge
Far off the white sails faded—rose at dawn,
And white robed, and in garb of sacrifice,
And with the sacred fillet round my brows,
Stood at the altar; and behind, ye twain,
Decked by your mother's hand with new-cleansed robes,
And with fresh flower-wreathed chaplets on your curls,
Attended, and your clear young voices made
Music that touched your father's eyes with tears,
If not the careless gods. I seem to hear
Those high sweet accents mounting in the hymn
Which rose to all the blessed gods who dwelt
Upon the far Olympus—Zeus, the Lord,
And Sovereign Here, and the immortal choir

Of Deities, but chiefly to the dread
Poseidon, him who sways the dark blue sea
As with a sceptre, and who shakes the earth
With stress of thundering surges. By the shrine
The meek-eyed victim, for the sacrifice,
Stood with his gilded horns. The hymns were done,
And I in act to strike, when all the crowd
Who knelt behind us, with a common fear
Cried, with a cry that well might freeze the blood,
And then, with fearful glances towards the sea,
Fled, leaving us alone—me, the high priest,
And ye, the acolytes, forlorn of men,
Alone, but with our god.

But we stirred not:

We could not flee, who in the solemn act
Of worship, and the ecstasy which comes
To the believer's soul, saw heaven revealed,
The mysteries unveiled, the inner sky

Which meets the dazzled eye. How should we fear
Who thus were god-encircled! So we stood
While the long ritual spent itself, nor cast
An eye upon the sea. Till as I came
To that great act which offers up a life
Before life's Lord, and the full mystery
Was trembling to completion, quick I heard
A stifled cry of agony, and knew
My children's voices. And the father's heart,
Which is far more than rite or service done
By man for god, seeing that it is divine
And comes from God to men—this rising in me,
Constrained me, and I ceased my prayer, and turned
To succour you, and lo! the awful coils
Which crushed your lives already, bound me round
And crushed me also, as you clung to me,
In common death. Some god had heard the prayer,
And lo! we were ourselves the sacrifice—

The priest, the victim, the accepted life,
The blood, the pain, the salutary loss.

Was it not better thus to die and cease
Together in one blest moment, mid the flush
And ecstasy of worship, and to know
Ourselves the victims? They were wrong who taught
That 'twas some hostile goddess who destroyed
Our lives, or angry for discovered wiles,
Or hateful of our land. Not easily
Should such mean jealousies affect the gods.
But rather do I hold it sooth indeed
That Zeus himself it was, who pitying
The ruin he foreknew, yet might not stay,
Since mightier Fate decreed it, sent in haste
Those dreadful messengers, and bade them take
The pious lives he loved, before the din
Of midnight slaughter woke, and the fair town

Flamed pitifully to the skies, and all
Was blood and ruin. Surely it was best
To die as we did, and in death to live,
A vision for all ages of high pain
Which passes into beauty, and is merged
In one accordant whole, as discords merge,
In that great Harmony which ceaseless rings
From the tense chords of life, than to have lived
Our separate lives, and died our separate deaths,
And left no greater mark than drops which rain
Upon the unbounded sea. Those hosts which fell
Before the Scæan gate upon the sand,
Nor found a bard to sing their fate, but left
Their bones to dogs and kites—were they more blest
Than we who, in the people's sight before
Ilium's unshattered towers, lay down to die
Our swift miraculous death? Dear sons, and good
Dear children of my love, now doubly dear

For this our common sorrow, suffering weaves
Not only chains of darkness round, but binds
A golden glittering link, which though withdrawn
Or felt no longer, knits us soul to soul,
In indissoluble bonds, and draws our lives
So close that, though the individual life
Be merged, there springs a common life which grows
To such dread beauty, as has power to take
The sting from sorrow, and transform the pain
Into transcendent joy, as from the storm
The unearthly rainbow draws its myriad hues
And steeps the world in fairness. All our lives
Are notes that fade and sink, and so are merged
In the full harmony of Being. Dear sons,
Cling closer to me. Life nor Death has torn
Our lives asunder, as for some, but drawn
Their separate strands together in a knot
Closer than Life itself, stronger than Death,

Insoluble as Fate."

Then they three clung
Together—the strong father and young sons,
And in their loving eyes I saw the Pain
Fade into Joy, Suffering in Beauty lost,
And Death in Love.

By a still sullen pool,
Into its dark depths gazing, lay the ghost
Whom next I passed. In form, a lovely youth,
Scarce passed from boyhood. Golden curls were his,
And wide blue eyes. The semblance of a smile
Came on his lip—a girl's but for the down

Which hardly shaded it; but the pale cheek
Was soft as any maiden's, and his robe
Was virginal, and at his breast he bore
The perfumed amber cup which, when March comes,
Gems the dry woods and windy wolds, and speaks
The resurrection.

Looking up, he said:

"Methought I saw her then, my love, my fair,
My beauty, my ideal; the dim clouds
Lifted, methought, a little—or was it
Fond Fancy only? For I know that here
No sunbeam cleaves the twilight, but a mist
Creeps over all the sky and fields and pools,
And blots them; and I know I seek in vain
My earth-sought beauty, nor can Fancy bring
An answer to my thought from these dead pools
And unawakened skies. Yet has use made
The quest so precious, that I keep it here,

Though knowing it is vain.

On the old earth

'Twas otherwise, when in fair Thessaly
I walked regardless of all nymphs who sought
My love, but sought in vain, whether it were
Dryad or Naiad from the woods or streams,
Or white-robed Oread fleeting on the side
Of fair Olympus, echoing back my sighs,—
In vain, for through the mountains day by day
I wandered, and along the foaming brooks,
And by the pine-woods dry, and never took
A thought for love, nor ever mid the throng
Of loving nymphs who knew me beautiful
I dallied, unregarding, till they said
Some died for love of me, who loved not one.
And yet I cared not, wandering still alone
Amid the mountains by the scented pines.

Till one fair day, when all the hills were still,
Nor any breeze made murmur through the trees,
Nor cloud was on the heavens, I wandered slow,
Leaving the nymphs who fain with dance and song
Had kept me midst the glades, and strayed away
Among the pines, enwrapt in fantasy,
And by the beechen glades which clothe the feet
Of fair Olympus, wrapt in fantasy,
Weaving the thin and unembodied shapes
Which Fancy loves to body forth, and leave
In marble or in song; and so strayed down
To a low sheltered vale above the plains,
Where the lush grass grew thick, and the stream stayed
Its garrulous tongue; and last upon the bank
Of a still pool I came, where was no flow
Of water, but the depths were clear as air,
And nothing but the silvery gleaming side
Of tiny fishes stirred. There lay I down

Upon the flowery bank, and scanned the depths,
Half in a waking dream.
Then swift there rose,
From those enchanted depths, a face more fair
Then ever I had dreamed of, and I knew
My sweet long-sought ideal: the long curls,
Like these, were golden, and the white robe showed
Like this; but for the wondrous eyes and lips,
The tender loving glance, the sunny smile
Upon the rosy mouth, these knew I not,
Not even in dreams; and yet I seemed to trace
Myself within them too, as who should find
His former self expunged, and him transformed
To some high thin ideal, separate
From what he is, by some invisible bar,
And yet the same in difference. As I moved
My arms to clasp her to me, lo! she moved
Her lovely arms to mine, smiled to my smile,

Looked love to love, and answered longing eyes
With longing. When my full heart burst in words,
'Dearest, I love thee,' lo! the lovely lips,
'Dearest, I love thee,' sighed, and through the air
The love-lorn echo rang. But when I longed
To answer kiss with kiss, and stooped my lips
To her sweet lips in that long kiss which strains
Soul unto soul, the cold lymph came between
And chilled our love, and kept us separate souls
Which fain would mingle, and the self-same heaven
Rose, a blue vault above us, and no shade
Of earthly thing obscured us, as we lay
Two reflex souls, one and yet different,
Two sundered souls longing to be at one.

There, all day long, until the light was gone
And took my love away, I lay and loved
The image, and when night was come, 'Farewell,'

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I whispered, and she whispered back, 'Farewell,'
With oh, such yearning! Many a day we spent
By that clear pool together all day long.
And many a clouded day on the wet grass
I lay beneath the rain, and saw her not,
And sickened for her; and sometimes the pool
Was thick with flood, and hid her; and sometimes
Some cold wind ruffled those clear wells, and left
But glimpses of her, and I rose at eve
Unsatisfied, a cold chill in my limbs
And fever at my heart, until, too soon!
The summer faded, and the skies were hid,
And my love came not, but a feverish thirst
Wasted my life. And all the winter long
The bright sun came not, or the thick ribbed ice
Obscured her, and I pined for her, and knew
My life ebb from me, till I grew too weak
To seek her, fearing I should see no more

My dear. And so the long dead winter waned
And the slow spring came back.
And one blithe day,
When life was in the woods, and the birds sang,
And soft airs fanned the hills, I knew again
Some gleam of hope within me, and again
With feeble limbs crawled forth, and felt the Spring
Blossom within me; and the flower-starred glades,
The bursting trees, the building nests, the songs,
The hurry of life revived me; and I crawled,
Ghost-like, amid the joy, until I flung
My panting frame, and weary nerveless limbs,
Down by the cold still pool.
And lo! I saw
My love once more, not beauteous as of old,
But oh, how changed! the fair young cheek grown pale,
The great eyes, larger than of yore, gazed forth
With a sad yearning look; and a great pain

And pity took me which was more than love,
And with a loud and wailing voice I cried,
'Dearest, I come again. I pine for thee,'
And swift she answered back, 'I pine for thee;'
'Come to me, oh, my own,' I cried, and she—
'Come to me, oh, my own.' Then with a cry
Of love I joined myself to her, and plunged
Beneath the icy surface with a kiss,
And fainted, and am here.

And now, indeed,
I know not if it was myself I sought,
As some tell, or another. For I hold
That what we seek is but our other self,
Other and higher, neither wholly like
Nor wholly different, the half-life the gods
Retained when half was given—one the man
And one the woman; and I longed to round
The imperfect essence by its complement,

For only thus the perfect life stands out
Whole, self-sufficing. Worse it is to live
Ill-mated than imperfect, and to move
From a false centre, not a perfect sphere,
But with a crooked bias sent oblique
Athwart life's furrows. 'Twas myself, indeed,
Thus only that I sought, that lovers use
To see in that they love, not that which is,
But that their fancy feigns, and view themselves
Reflected in their love, yet glorified,
And finer and more pure.
Wherefore it is
All love which finds its own ideal mate
Is happy—happy that which gives itself
Unto itself, and keeps, through long calm days,
The tranquil image in its eyes, and knows
Fulfilment and is blest, and day by day
Wears love like a white flower, nor holds it less

Though sharp winds nip, or hot suns fade, or age
Sully its perfect whiteness, but inhales
Its fragrance, and is glad. But happier still
He who long seeks a high goal unattained,
And wearies for it all his days, nor knows
Possession sate his thirst, but still pursues
The fleeting loveliness—now seen, now lost,
But evermore grown fairer, till at last
He stretches forth his arms and takes the fair
In one long rapture, and its name is Death."

Thus he; and seeing me stand grave, "Farewell,
If ever thou shouldst happen on a wood
In Thessaly, upon the plain-ward spurs
Of fair Olympus, take the path which winds
Through the close vale, and thou shalt see the pool
Where once I found my life. And if in Spring
Thou go there, round the margin thou shalt know

These amber flowers spring sweetly, smiling down
Upon the crystal surface. Pluck them not,
But kneel a little while, and breathe a prayer
To the fair god of Love, and let them be,
For in those tender flowers is hid the life
That once was mine. All things are bound in one
In earth and heaven, nor is there any gulf
'Twixt things that live,—the flower that was a life,
The life that is a flower,—but one sure chain
Binds all, as now I know.
If there are still
Fair Oreads on the hills, say to them, sir,
They must no longer pine for me, but find
Some worthier lover, who can love again;
For I have found my love."
And to the pool
He turned, and gazed with lovely eyes, and showed
Fair as an angel.

Leaving him enwrapt
In musings, to a gloomy pass I came
Between dark rocks, where scarce a gleam of light,
Not even the niggard light of that dim land,
Might enter; and the soil was black and bare—
Nor even the dead growths which scarcely clothed
The higher fields might live. Hard by a cave
Which sloped down steeply to the utmost depths,
Whence dreadful sounds ascended, seated still,
Her head upon her hands, I saw a maid
With eyes fixed on the ground—not Erebus;
It was but Hades; and she knew no pain,

Except her painful thought. Yet there it seemed,
As here, the unequal measure which awaits
The adjustment, and meanwhile, inspires the strife
Which rears life's palace walls, and fills the sail
Which bears our bark, across unfathomed seas,
To its last harbour; this bore sway there too,
And 'twas a luckless shade which sat and wept
Amid the gloom, though blameless. Suddenly,
She raised her head, and lo! the long curls, writhed,
Tangled, and snake-like—like the dripping hair
Of some young life which, ending sin with life,
From out the cruel wintry flow, is laid
Stark on the snow, with dreadful staring eyes
Like hers. For when she raised her eyes to mine,
They chilled my blood, so great a woe they bore;
And as she gazed, wide-eyed, I knew my pulse
Beat slow, and my limbs stiffen. Then they wore,
At length, a softer look, and life revived

Within my breast as thus she softly spoke:

"Nay, friend, I would not harm thee. I have known
Great sorrow, and sometimes it racks me still,
And turns me into stone, and makes my eyes
As dreadful as of yore; and yet it comes
But seldom, as thou sawest, now, for Time
And Death have healing hands. Only I love
To sit within the darkness here, nor face
The throng of happier ghosts, if any ghost
Of happiness come here. For on the earth
They wronged me bitterly, and turned to stone
My heart, till scarce I knew if e'er I was
The happy girl I mind.

That youth who dreams
Up yonder by the margin of the lake,
Knew but a cold ideal love, but me
Love in unearthly guise, but bodily form,

Seized and betrayed.

I was a priestess once,
Of stern Athené, doing day by day
Due worship; raising, every dawn that came,
My cold pure hymns to take her virgin ear;
Nor sporting with the joyous company
Of youths and maids, who, at the neighbouring shrine
Of Aphrodité served. Nor dance nor song
Allured me, nor the pleasant days of youth
And twilights mid the vines. They held me cold
Who were my friends in childhood. For my soul
Was virginal, and at the virgin shrine
I knelt, athirst for knowledge. Day by day
The long cold ritual sped, the liturgies
Were done, the barren hymns of praise went up
Before the goddess, and the ecstasy
Of faith possessed me wholly, till almost
I knew not I was woman. Yet I knew

That I was fair to see, and fit to share
Some natural honest love, and bear the load
Of children like the rest, only my soul
Was lost in higher yearnings.
Like a god,
He burst upon those pallid lifeless days,
Bringing fresh airs and salt, as from the sea,
And wrecked my life. How should a virgin know
Deceit, who, never at the joyous shrine
Of Cypris knelt, but ever lived apart,
And so grew guilty? For if I had spent
My days among the throng, either my fault
Were blameless or undone. For innocence
The tempter spreads his net. For innocence
The gods keep all their terrors. Innocence
It is that bears the burden, which for guilt
Is lightened, and the spoiler goes his way,
Singing and joyous, leaving her alone,

The victim and unfriended.

Was it just
In her, my mistress, who had had my youth,
To wreak such vengeance on me? I had erred,
It may be; but on him, whose was the guilt;
No heaven-sent vengeance lighted, but he sped
Away to other hearts across the deep,
Careless and free; but me, the cold stern eyes
Of the pure goddess withered; and the scorn
Of maids, despised before, and the great blank
Of love, whose love was gone—this wrung my heart,
And froze my blood; set on my brow despair,
And turned my gaze to stone, and filled my eyes
With horror, and stiffened the soft curls which once
Lay smooth and fair into such snake-like rings
As made my aspect fearful. All who saw,
Shrank from me and grew cold, and felt the warm
Full tide of life freeze in them, seeing in me

Love's work, who sat wrapt up and lost in shame,
As in a cloak, consuming my own heart,
And was in hell already. As they gazed
Upon me, my despair looked forth so cold
From out my eyes, that if some spoiler came
Fresh from his wickedness, and looked on them,
Their glare would strike him dead; and those fair curls,
Which once the accursèd toyed with, grew to be
The poisonous things thou seest; and so, with hate
Of man's injustice and the gods', who knew
Me blameless, and yet punished me, and sick
Of life and love, and loathing earth and sky,
And feeding on my sorrow, Hate at last
Left me a Fury.

Ah, the load of life
Which lives for hatred! We are made to love—
We women, and the injury which turns
The honey of our lives to gall, transforms

The angel to the fiend. For it is sweet
To know the dreadful sense of strength and smite
And leave the tyrant dead with a glance; aye! sweet,
In that fierce lust of power, to slay the life
Which harmed not, when the suppliants' cry ascends
To ears which hate has deafened. So I lived
Long time in misery. To my sleepless eyes
No healing slumbers coming; but at length,
Zeus and the goddess pitying, I knew
Soft rest once more veiling my dreadful gaze
In peaceful slumbers. Then a blessed dream
I dreamt. For, lo! a god-like knight in mail
Of gold, who sheared with his keen flashing blade,
With scarce a pang of pain, the visage cold
Which too great sorrow left me, at one stroke,
Clean from the trunk, and then o'er land and sea,
Invisible, sped, with winged heels, to where,
Upon a sea-worn cape, a fair young maid,

More blameless even than I was, chained and bound,
Waited a monster from the deep, and stood
In innocent nakedness. Then, as he rose,
Loathsome from out the depths, a monstrous growth,
A creature wholly serpent, partly man,
The wrongs that I had known, stronger than death,
Rose up with such black hate in me again,
And wreathed such hissing poison through my hair,
And shot such deadly glances from my eyes,
That nought that saw might live. And the vile worm
Was slain, and she delivered. Then I dreamt,
My mistress, whom I thought so stern to me,
Athené, set those dreadful staring eyes,
And that despairing visage, on her shield
Of chastity, and bears it evermore
To fright the waverer from the wrong he would,
And strike the unrepenting sin with death."

Then for a little paused she, while I saw
Again her eyes grown dreadful, till once more,
And with a softer glance:
"From that blest dream
I woke not on the earth, but only here.
And now my pain is lightened since I know
My dream, which was a dream within the dream
Which is our life, fulfilled. And I have saved
Another through my suffering, and through her
A people. Oh, strange chain of sacrifice,
That binds an innocent life, and from its blood
And sorrow works out joy! Oh, mystery
Of pain and evil! wrong grown salutary,
And mighty to redeem! If thou shouldst see
Some poor maid on the earth, who pays to-day
The penalty of sin, and the new gods
(For after Saturn, Zeus ruled, after him
It may be there are others) love to take

The tender heart of girlhood, and to immure
Within a cold and cloistered cell the life
Which nature meant to bless, and if Love come
Hold her accursèd; or to some poor maid,
Forlorn and trusting, still the tempter comes
And works his wrong, and leaves her to despair
And shame and all abhorrence, while he goes
His way unpunished,—if thou know her eyes
Freeze thee like mine—oh! bid her lose her pain
In succouring others—say to her that Time
And Death have healing hands, and here there comes
To the forgiven transgressor only pain
Enough to chasten joy."

And a soft tear
Trembled within her eyes, and her sweet gaze
Was as the Magdalen's, the horror gone
And a great radiance come.

Then as I passed
To upper air, I saw two figures come
Together, one a woman with a calm
Fair face not all unhappy, and the robes
And presence of a queen; and with her walked
The fairest youth that ever maiden's dream
Conceived. And as they came, the throng of ghosts,
For these who were not wholly ghosts, arose,
And did them homage. Not the chain of love
Bound them, but such calm kinship as is born
Of long and difficult pilgrimages borne
Through common perils by two souls which share

A common weary exile. Not as ghosts
These showed, but rather like two lives which hung
Suspended in a trance. A halo of life
Played round them, and they brought a sweet brisk air
Tasting of earth and heaven, like sojourners
Who stayed but for awhile, and knew a swift
Release await them. First the youth it was
Who spake thus as they passed:

"Dread Queen, once more
I feel life stir within me, and my blood
Run faster, while a new strange cycle turns
And grows completed. Soon on the dear earth,
Under the cheerful light of fuller day,
I shall revive me of my wound; and thou,
Passing with me the cold and lifeless stream,
And the grim monster who will fawn on thee,
Shalt issue in royal pomp, and wreathed with flowers,
Upon the cheerful earth, leaving behind

A deeper winter for the ghosts who dwell
Within these sunless haunts; and I shall lie
Once more within loved arms, and thou shalt see
Thy early home, and kiss thy mother's cheek,
And be a girl again. But not for long;
For ere the bounteous Autumn spreads her hues
Of gold and purple, a cold voice will call
And bring us to these wintry lands once more,
As erst so often. Blest are we, indeed,
Above the rest, and yet I would I knew
The careless joys of old.
For in hot youth,
Oh, it was sweet to greet the balmy night
That was love's nurse, and feel the weary eyes
Closed by soft kisses,—sweet at early dawn
To wake refreshed and, scarce from loving arms
Leaping, to issue forth, with winding horn.
By dewy heath and brake, and taste the fair

Young breath of early morning; and 'twas sweet
To chase the bounding quarry all day long
With my true hounds and rapid steed, and gay
Companions of my youth, and with the eve
To turn home laden with the spoil, and take
The banquet which awaited, and sweet wine
Poured out, and kisses from the lovely lips,
And white encircling arms. Oh, it was sweet
To be alive and young!
For sure it is
The gods gave not quick pulses and hot blood
And strength and beauty for no end, but would
That we should use them wisely; and the fair,
Sweet mistress of my service was, indeed,
Worthy of all observance. Oh, her eyes
When I lay bleeding! All day long we rode,
I and my youthful peers, with horse and hound,
And knew the joy of swift pursuit and toil

And peril. At the last, a fierce boar turned
At bay, and with his gleaming tusks o'erthrew
My steed, and as I fell upon the flowers,
Pierced me as with a sword. Then, as I lay,
I knew the strange cold chill which, stealing, tells
The young that it is death. Yet knew I not
Or pain or fear, only great pity, indeed,
That she should lose her love, who was so fond
And gracious. But, when opening my dim gaze,
"I saw her bend o'er me,—the lovely eyes
Suffused with tears, and her sweet smile replaced
By agonized sorrow,—for a while I stayed
' Life's ebbing tide, and raised my dying eyes,
With a faint smile, to hers. Then, with a kiss—
One long last kiss, we mingled, and I knew
No more.

But even in death, so strong is Love,
I could not wholly die; and year by year,

When the bright spring time comes, and the earth lives,
Love opens these dread gates, and calls me forth
Across the gulf. Not here, indeed, she comes,
Being a goddess and in heaven, but smooths
My path to the old earth, where still I know
Once more the sweet lost days, and once again
Blossom on that soft breast, and am again
A youth, and rapt in love, and yet not all
As careless as of yore; but seem to know
The early spring of passion, tamed, by time
And suffering, to a calmer, fuller flow,
Less fitful, but more strong."

Then the sad Queen:

"Fair youth, thy lot I know, for I am old
As the old earth is, yet as young as is
The budding spring, and I was here a Queen,
When Love was not or Time, and to my arms
Thou camest as a little child, and dwelt

Within the halls of Death, for without Death
There were nor Birth nor Love, nor would Life yearn
To lose itself within another life,
And dying to be born. I, too, have died
For love in part, and live again through love;
For in the far-off years, when Time was young,
And love unborn on earth, and Zeus in heaven
Ruled, a young sovereign; I, a maiden, dwelt
With dread Demeter on the lovely plains
Of sunny Sicily. There, day by day,
I sported with the maiden goddesses,
In virgin freedom. Budding age made gay
Our lightsome feet, and on the flowery slopes
We wandered daily, gathering flowers to weave
In careless garlands for our locks, and passed
The days in innocent gladness. Thought of Love
There came not to us, for as yet the earth
Was virginal, nor yet had Eros come

With his delicious pain.

And one fair morn,
Not all the ages blot it; on the side
Of Ætna we were straying. There was then
Summer nor winter, springtide nor the time
Of harvest, but the soft unfailing sun
Shone always, and the sowing time was one
With reaping; fruit and flowers together sprung
Upon the trees; and blade and ripened ear
Together clothed the plains. There, as I strayed,
Sudden a black cloud down the rugged side
Of Ætna, mixed with fire and dreadful sound
Of thunder, rolled around me, and I heard
The maids who were my fellows turn and flee,
With shrieks and cries for me.

But I, I knew
No terror while the god o'ershadowed me,
Hiding my life in his, nor when I knew

My flowers all withered, and my blood run slow
Within a wintry land. Some voice there was
Which said, 'Fear not. Thou shalt return and see
Thy mother again, only a little while.
Fate wills that thou shouldst tarry, and become
Queen of another world. Thou seest that all
Thy flowers are faded. They shall live again
On earth, as thou shalt, as thou livest now
The Life of Death—for what is Death but Life
Suspended as in sleep? The changeless rule
Where life was constant, and the sun o'erhead,
Blazed forth for ever, changes and is hidden
Awhile. This region which thou seest, where all
The trees are lifeless, and the flowers are dead,
Is but the self-same earth on which erewhile
Thou sportedst fancy free.'

So, without fear
I wandered on this bare land, seeing far

Upon the sky the peaks of my own hills
And crests of my own woods. Till, when I grew
Hungered, before another form I saw;
Along the silent alleys journeying,
And leafless groves; a fair and mystic tree
Rose like a heart in shape, and mid its leaves
One golden mystic fruit with a fair seed
Set in it. This, with childish hand, I took
And ate, and straight I knew the tree was Life,
And the fruit Death, and the hid seed was Love.

Ah, sweet strange fruit! the which if any eat
They may no longer keep their lives of old
Or their own selves unchanged, but some weird change
And subtle alchemy comes which can transmute
The blood, and moulds the spirits of gods and men
In some new magical form. Not as before,
Our life comes to us, though the passion cools,

No, never as before. My mother came
Too late to seek me. She had power to raise
A life from out Death's grasp, but from the arms
Of Love, she might not take me, nor undo
Love's past for all her strength. She came and sought
With fires her daughter over land and sea,
Beyond the paths of all the setting stars,
In vain, and over all the earth in vain,
Seeking whom love disguised. Then on all lands
She cast the spell of barrenness; the wheat
Was blighted in the ear, the purple grapes
Blushed no more on the vines, and all the gods
Were sorrowful, seeing the load of ill
My rape had laid on men. Last, Zeus himself,
Pitying the evil that was done, sent forth
His messenger beyond the western rim
To fetch me back to earth.

But not the same

He found me who had eaten of Love's seed,
But changed into another; nor could his power
Prevail to keep me wholly on the earth,
Or make me maid again. The wintry life
Is homelier often than the noontide glare
Of happiness unclouded; so, when spring
Comes on the world, I, coming, cross with thee,
Year after year, the cruel icy stream;
And leave this anxious sceptre and the shades
Of those in hell, or those for whom, though blest,
No spring comes, till the last great spring which brings
New heavens and new earth; and lay my head
Upon my mother's bosom, and grow young
And am a girl again.
A soft air breathes
Across the stream and fills these barren fields
With the sweet odours of the earth. I know
Again the scent of the wood violets

Which bloom on Ætna's sides. Soon we shall pass
Together to our home, while round our feet
The crocus flames like gold, the wind-flowers white
Shake their soft petals on the breeze, and all
The choir of flowers lift up their silent song
To the unclouded heavens. Thou, fair boy,
Shalt lie within thy love's white arms again,
And I within my mother's. Sweet is Love
In ceasing and renewal; nay, in these
It lives and has its being. Thou couldst not keep
Thy youth as now, if always on the breast
Of love thou still hadst lain, and thou hadst known
Possession sate thee. Nor might I have kept
My mother's heart, if I had lived to ripe
And wither on the stalk. Time calls and Change
Commands both men and gods, and speeds us on
We know not whither; but the old earth smiles
Spring after spring, and the seed bursts again

Out of its prison mould, and the dead lives
Renew themselves, and rise aloft and soar
And are transformed, clothing themselves with change
Till the last change be done."

As thus she spake,
I saw a gleam of light flash from the eyes
Of all the listening shades, and a great joy
Thrill through the realms of Death.

And then again
A youthful shade I saw, a comely boy,
With lip and cheek just touched with manly down,
And strong limbs wearing spring; in mien and garb
A youthful chieftain, with a perfect face
Of fresh young beauty, clustered curls divine,
And chiselled features like a sculptured god.

But warm and breathing life; only the eyes,
The fair large eyes, were full of dreaming thought,
And seemed to gaze beyond the world of sight,
On a hid world of beauty. Him I stayed,
Accosting with soft words of courtesy;
And, on a bank of scentless flowers reclined,
He answered thus:

"Not for the garish sun
I long, nor for the splendours of high noon
In this dim land I languish; for I mind
How ofttimes, when the swift chase swept along
Through the brisk morn, or when my comrades stript
For wrestling, or the foot-race, or to cleave
The sunny stream, I loved to walk apart,
Self-centred, sole; and when the laughing girls
To some fair stripling's oaten melody
Made ready for the dance, I heeded not;
Nor when to the loud trumpet's blast and blare

My peers rode forth to battle. For, one eve,
In Latmos, after a long day in June,
I stayed to rest me on a wooded hill,
Where often youth and maid were wont to meet
Towards moonrise; and deep slumber fell on me.
Thinking of Love, just as the ruddy orb
Rose on the lucid night, set in a frame
Of myrtle and of sharp plane tremulous;
Deep slumber fell, and loosed my limbs in rest.

Then, as the full orb poised upon the peak,
There came a lovely vision of a maid,
Who seemed to step as from a golden car
Out of the low-hung moon. No mortal form,
Such as ofttimes of yore I knew and clasped
At twilight mid the vines at the mad feast
Of Dionysus, or the fair maids cold
Who streamed in white processions to the shrine

Of the chaste Virgin Goddess; but a shape
Richer and yet more pure. No thinnest veil
Obscured her; but each exquisite limb revealed,
Gleamed like a golden statue subtly wrought
By a great sculptor on the architrave
Of some high temple vast—only in her
Each limb was soft and warm, and charged with life
And breathing. As I seemed to gaze on her,
Nearer she drew and gazed; and as I lay
Supine, as in a spell, the radiance stooped
And kissed me on the lips, a chaste, sweet kiss,
Which drew my spirit with it. So I slept
Each night upon the hill, until the dawn
Came in her silver chariot from the East,
And chased my Love away; but ever thus
Dissolved in love as in a heaven-sent dream,
Whenever the bright circle of the moon
Rose on the hills, whether in leafy June

Or harvest-tide, or when they leapt and pressed
Red-thighed the spouting must, I walked apart
From all, and took no thought for mortal maid,
Nor nimble joys of youth; but night by night
I stole, when all were sleeping, to the hill,
And slumbered and was blest; until I grew
Possest by love so deep, I seemed to live
In slumbers only, while the waking day
Showed faint as any vision.
So I turned
Paler and paler with the months, and climbed
The steep with laboured steps and difficult breath,
But still I climbed. Ay, though the wintry frost
Chained fast the streams and whitened every hill,
I sought my mistress through the leafless groves,
And slumbered and was happy, till the dawn
Returning found me stretched out, cold and stark,
With life's fire nigh burnt out. Till one clear night,

When the birds shivered in the pines, and all
The inner heavens stood open, lo! she came,
Brighter and kinder still, and kissed my eyes
And half-closed lips, and drew my soul through them,
And in one precious ecstasy dissolved
My life. And thenceforth, ever on the hill
I lie unseen of man; a cold, white form,
Still young, through all the ages; but my soul,
Clothed in this thin presentment of old days,
Walks this dim land, where never moonrise comes,
Nor day-break, but a twilight waiting-time,
No more; and, ah! how weary! Yet I judge
My lot a higher far than his who spends
His youth on swift hot pleasure, quickly past;
Or those, my equals, who through long calm years
Grew sleek in dull content of wedded lives
And fair-grown offspring. Many a day for them,
While I was wandering here, and my bones bleached

Upon the hills, the sweet soft sun of June
Broke, and the grapes grew purple. Many a day
They heaped up gold, they knelt at festivals,
They waxed in high report and fame of men,
They gave their girls in marriage; while for me
Upon the untrodden peaks, the cold, grey morn,
The snows, the rains, the winds, the untempered blaze,
Beat year by year, until I turned to stone,
And the great eagles shrieked at me, and wheeled
Affrighted. Yet I judge it best indeed
To seek in life, as now I know I sought,
Some fair impossible Love, which slays our life,
Some high ideal raised too high for man;
And failing to grow mad, and cease to be,
Than to decline, as they do who have found
Broad-paunched content and weal and happiness:
And so an end. For one day, as I know,
The high aim unfulfilled fulfils itself;

The deep, unsatisfied thirst is satisfied;
And through this twilight, broken suddenly,
The inmost heaven, the lucent stars of God,
The Moon of Love, the Sun of Life; and I,
I who pine here—I on the Latmian hill
Shall soar aloft and find them."

With the word,
The faint sun shot a beam athwart the fields,
And woke them, and the thrush from out the yew
Sang out reveillé to the coming day,
Soldier-like; and the pomp and rush of life
Began once more, and left me there alone
Amid the awaking world.

Nay, not alone,
One fair shade lingered in the fuller day,
The last to come, when now my dream had grown
Half mixed with waking thoughts, as does a dream
In summer mornings when the growing light
Dazzles the sleeper's eyes, and is most fair
Of all and best remembered, and becomes
Part of our waking life, when older dreams
Grow fainter, and are fled. So this remained
The fairest of the visions that I knew,
Most precious and most dear.
The increasing light
Shone through her, finer than the thinnest shade,

And yet most full of beauty; golden wings,
From her fair shoulders springing, seemed to lift
Her stainless feet from the cold ground and snatch
Their wearer into air; and in her eyes
Was such fair glance as comes from virgin love,
Long chastened and triumphant. Every trace
Of earth had vanished from her, and she showed
As one who walks a saint already in life,
Virgin or mother. Immortality
Breathed from those radiant eyes which yet had passed
Between the gates of death. I seemed to hear
The soul of mortals speaking:

"I was born
Of a great race and mighty, and was grown
Fair, as they said, and good, and kept a life
Pure from all stain of passion. Love I knew not,
Who was absorbed in duty; and the Mother
Of gods and men, seeing my life more calm

Than human, hating my impassive heart,
Sent down her perfect son in wrath to earth,
And bade him break me.

But when Eros came,
It did repent him of the task, for Love
Is kin to Duty.

And within my life
I knew miraculous change, and a soft flame
Wherefrom the snows of Duty flushed to rose,
And the chill icy flow of mind was turned
To a warm stream of passion. Long I lived
Not knowing what had been, nor recognized
A Presence walking with me through my life,
As if by night, his face and form concealed.
A gracious voice alone, which none but I
Might hear, sustained me, and its name was Love.

Not as the earthly loves which throb and flush

Round earthly shrines was mine, but a pure spirit,—
Lovelier than all embodied love, more pure
And wonderful; but never on his eyes
I looked, which still were hidden, and I knew not
The fashion of his nature, for by night,
When visual eyes are blind, but the soul sees,
Came he, and bade me seek not to enquire
Or whence he came or wherefore. Nor knew I
His name. And always ere the coming day,
As if he were the Sun-god, lingering
With some too well-loved maiden, he would rise
And vanish until eve. But all my being
Thrilled with my fair unearthly visitant
To higher duty and more glorious meed
Of action than of old, for it was Love
Who came to me, who might not know his name.

And wrapt up thus in beauteous dreams, I knew

The scorn which comes from weaker souls, who miss,
Being too low of nature, the great joy
Revealed to others higher; nay, my sisters,
Who being of the same blood with me, made choice
To tread the lower ways of daily life,
Grew jealous of me, bidding me take heed
Lest haply 'twas some monstrous fiend I loved,
As in old fables sometimes sought and won
The innocent hearts of maids. Long time I held
My love too dear for doubt, who was so sweet
And lovable. But at the last the sneers,
The mystery which hid him, the swift flight
Before the coming dawn, the shape concealed,
The curious girlish heart, these worked on me
With an unsatisfied thirst. Not his own words:
'Dear, I am with thee only while I keep
My visage hidden; and if thou once shouldst see
My face, I must forsake thee. The high gods

Link Love with Faith, and he withdraws himself
From the full gaze of Knowledge'—not even these
Could cure me of my longing, or the fear
Those mocking voices worked, who fain would learn
The worst that might befall.
And one sad night,
Just as the day leapt from the hills and brought
The hour when he should go: with tremulous hands,
Lighting my midnight lamp with fear, I stood
Long time uncertain, and at length turned round
And gazed upon my love. He lay asleep,
And oh, how fair he was! The flickering light
Fell on the fairest of the gods, stretched out
In happy slumbers. Looking on his locks
Of gold, and faultless face and smile, and limbs
Made perfect, a great joy and trembling took me
Who was most blest of women, and in awe
And fear I stooped to kiss him. One warm drop—

From the full lamp within my trembling hand,
Or a glad tear from my too happy eyes,
Fell on his shoulder.

Then the god unclosed
His lovely eyes, and with great pity spake:
'Farewell! There is no Love except with Faith,
And thine is dead! Farewell! I come no more.'
And straightway from the hills the full red sun
Leapt up, and as I clasped my love again,
The lovely vision faded from his place,
And came no more.

Then I, with breaking heart,
Knowing my life laid waste by my own hand,
Went forth and would have sought to hide my life
Within the stream of Death; but Death came not
To aid me who not yet was meet for Death.

Then finding that Love came not back to me,

I thought that in the temples of the gods
Haply he dwelt, and so from fane to fane
I wandered over earth, and knelt in each,
Enquiring for my Love; and I would ask
The priests and worshippers, 'Is this Love's shrine?
Sirs, have you seen the God?' But never at all
I found him. For some answered, 'This is called
The Shrine of Knowledge;' and another, 'This
The Shrine of Beauty;' and another, 'Strength;'
And yet another, 'Youth.' And I would kneel
And say a prayer to my Love, and rise
And seek another. Long, o'er land and sea,
I wandered, till I was not young or fair,
Grown wretched, seeking my lost Love; and last,
Came to the smiling hateful shrine where ruled
The queen of earthly love and all delight,
Cypris, but knelt not there, but asked of one
Who seemed her priest, if Eros dwelt with her.

Then to the subtle smiling goddess' self
They led me. She, with hatred in her eyes:
"What! thou to seek for Love, who art grown thin
And pale with watching! He is not for thee.
What Love is left for such? Thou didst despise
Love, and didst dwell apart. Love sits within
The young maid's eyes, making them beautiful.
Love is for youth, and joy, and happiness;
And not for withered lives. Ho! bind her fast.
Take her and set her to the vilest tasks,
And bend her pride by solitude and tears
Who will not kneel to me, but dares to seek
A disembodied love. My son has gone
And left thee for thy fault, and thou shalt know
The torture of my slaves.

Then in her house
They bound me to hard tasks and vile, and kept

My life from honour, chained among her slaves
And lowest ministers, taking despite
And injury for food, and set to bind
Their wounds whom she had tortured, and to feed
The pitiful lives which in her prisons pent
Languished in hopeless pain. There is no sight
Of suffering but I saw it, and was set
To succour it; and all my woman's heart
Was torn with the ineffable miseries
Which love and life have caused; and dwelt long time
In groanings and in tears.

And then, oh joy!
Oh, miracle! once more at length again
I felt Love's arms around me, and the kiss
Of Love upon my lips, and in the chill
Of deepest prison cells, mid vilest tasks,
The glow of his sweet breath, and the warm touch
Of his invisible hand, and his sweet voice,

Aye, sweeter than of old, and tenderer,
Speak to me, pierce me, hold me, fold me round
With arms Divine, till all the sordid earth
Was hued like heaven, and Life's dull prison-house
Turned to a golden palace, and those low tasks
Grew to be higher works and nobler gains
Than any gains of knowledge, and at last
He whispered softly, 'Dear, unclose thine eyes.
Thou mayst look on me now. I go no more,
But am thine own for ever.'

Then with wings
Of gold we soared, I looking in his eyes,
Over yon dark broad river, and this dim land,
Scarce for an instant staying till we reached
The inmost courts of heaven.

But sometimes still
I come here for a little, and speak a word
Of peace to those who wait. The slow wheel turns,

The cycles round themselves and grow complete,
The world's year whitens to the harvest-tide,
And one word only am I sent to say
To those dear souls, who wait here, or who now
Breathe earthly air—one universal word
To all things living, and the word is 'Love.'"

Then soared she visibly before my gaze,
And the heavens took her, and I knew my eyes
Had seen the soul of man, the deathless soul,
Defeated, struggling, purified, and blest.

Then all the choir of happy waiting shades,
Heroes and queens, fair maidens and brave youths,
Swept by me rhythmic, slow, as if they trod
Some unheard measure, passing where I stood

In fair procession, each with a faint smile
Upon the lip, signing "Farewell, O shade!
It shall be well with thee, as 'tis with us,
If only thou art true. The world of Life,
The world of Death, are but opposing sides
Of one great orb, and the Light shines on both."
And so they passed away.

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.

OLYMPUS.

But I, my gaze
Following the soaring soul which now was lost
In the awakening skies, floated with her,
As in a trance, beyond the golden gates
Which separate Earth from Heaven ; and to my thought,
Dazzled by that fine effluence of light,
This old earth seemed transfigured, and the fields,
So dim and bare, grew green and clothed themselves
With lustrous hues. A fine ethereal air
Played round me as I mused, and filled the soul
With an ineffable content. What need

Of words to tell of things unreached by words?
Or seek to engrave upon the treacherous thought
The fair and fugitive fancies of a dream,
Which vanish ere we fix them?

But methinks
He knows the scene, who knows the one fair day,
One only and no more, which year by year
In springtime comes, when lingering winter flies,
And lo! the trees blossom in white and pink
And golden clusters, and the glades are full
Of yellow primrose and sweet odorous beds
Of violets, and on the tufted fields
With kingcups starred, and cowslip bells, and blue
Sweet hyacinths, and frail anemones,
The broad West wind breathes softly, and the air
Is tremulous with the lark, and thro' the woods
The soft full-throated thrushes all day long
Flood the green dells with joy, and thro' the dry

Brown fields the sower goes, sowing his seed,
And all is life and song. Or he who first,
Whether in fair free boyhood, when the world
Is his to choose, or when his fuller life
Beats to another life, or afterwards,
Keeping his youth within his children's eyes,
Looks on the snow-clad everlasting hills,
And marks the sunset smite them, and is glad
Of the beautiful fair world.

A spring-tide land
It seemed, where East winds came not. Sweetest song
Was everywhere, by glade or sunny plain;
And thro' the golden valleys winding streams
Rippled in glancing silver, and above,
The blue hills rose, and over all a peak,
White, awful, with a constant fleece of cloud
Veiling its summit, towered. Unfailing Day
Lighted it, for no turn of dawn and eve

Came there, nor changing seasons, but a broad
Fixed joy of Being, undisturbed by Time.

There, in a happy glade shut in by groves
Of laurel and sweet myrtle, on a green
And flower-lit lawn, I seemed to see the ghosts
Of the old gods. Upon the gentle slope
Of a fair hill, a joyous company,
The Immortals lay. Hard by, a murmurous stream
Fell through the flowers; below them, space on space,
Laughed the immeasurable plains; beyond,
The mystic mountain soared. Height after height
Of bare rock ledges left the climbing pines,
And reared their giddy, shining terraces
Into the ethereal air. Above, the snows
Of the white summit cleft the fleece of cloud
Which always clothed it round.

Ah, fair and sweet,

Yet with a ghostly fairness, fine and thin,
Those godlike Presences. Not dreams indeed,
But something dream-like, were they. Blessed Shades
Heroic and Divine, as when, in days
When Man was young, and Time, the vivid thought
Translated into Form the unattained
Impossible Beauty of men's dreams, and fixed
The Loveliness in marble.

As with awe
Following my spotless guide, I stood apart,
Not daring to draw near ; a shining form
Rose from the throng, and floated, light as air,
To where I trembled. And I knew the face
And form of Artemis, the fair, the pure,
The undefiled. A crescent silvery moon
Shone thro' her locks, and by her side she bare
A quiver of golden darts. At sight of whom
I felt a sudden chill, like his who once

Looked upon her and died ; yet could not fear,
Seeing how fair she was. Her sweet voice rang
Clear as a bird's :
" Mortal, what fate has brought
Thee hither, uncleansed by death ? How canst thou
breathe
Immortal air, being mortal ? Yet fear not,
Since thou art come. For we too are of earth
Whom here thou seest : there were not a heaven
Were there no earth, nor gods, had men not been,
But each the complement of each and grown
The other's creature, is and has its being,
A double essence, Human and Divine.
So that the God is hidden in the Man,
And something Human bounds and forms the God ;
Which else had shown too great and undefined
For mortal sight, and having no human eye
To see it, were unknown. But we who bore

Sway of old time, we were but attributes
*Of the great God who is all Things that be—
The Pillar of the Earth and starry skies,
The Depth of the great Deep; the Sun, the Moon,
The Word which Makes; the All-compelling Love—
For all Things lie within His boundless Form."

Even as she spake, a throng of heavenly forms
Floated around me, filling all my soul
With fair unearthly beauty, and the air
With such ambrosial perfume as is born
When morning bursts upon a tropic sea,
From boundless wastes of flowers; and as I knelt
In rapture, lo! the same clear voice again
From out the throng of gods:

"Those whom thou seest
Were even as I, embodiments of Him

* See the Orphic Hymns.

Who is the Centre of all Life. Myself
The Maiden-Queen of Purity; and Strength,
Divine when unabused; Love too, the Spring
And Cause of Things; and Knowledge, which lays bare
Their secret; and calm Duty, Queen of all
And Motherhood in one; and Youth, which bears
Beauty of Form and Life and Light, and breathes
The breath of Inspiration; and the Soul,
The particle of God, sent down to man,
Which doth in turn reveal the world and God.

Wherefore it is men called on Artemis,
The refuge of young souls; for still in age
They keep some dim reflection uneffaced
Of a Diviner Purity than comes
To the spring days of youth, when all the world
Smiles, and the rapid blood thro' the young veins
Courses, and all is glad, yet knowing too

That innocence is young—before the soil
And smirch of fuller years, settling on it,
Sullies its primal whiteness. So they knelt
At my white shrines, the eager vigorous youths,
To whom their life showed like a dewy field
In early summer dawns, when to the sound
Of youth's clear voice, and to the cheerful rush
Of the tumultuous feet and clamorous tongues
That bear it onwards, fair and dappled fawns,
Strange birds with jewelled plumes, fierce spotted pards,
Rise in the chase of life, to be caught and bound
By the young conqueror; nor as yet the charm
Of sensual ease allures. And they knelt too,
The pure sweet maidens fair and fancy-free,
Whose innocent virgin hearts shrank from the touch
Of passion as from wrong—sweet moonlit lives
Which fade, and pale, and vanish, in the glare
Of Love's hot summer: these came robed in white,

With holy hymns and soaring liturgies.
And so men fabled me, a huntress now,
Borne thro' the flying woodlands, fair and free;
And now the pale cold Moon, Light without warmth,
Zeal without touch of passion, heavenly love
For human, and the altar for the home.

But oh, how sweet it was to take the love
And awe of my young worshippers, to watch
The pure young eyes and hear the pure young voice
Mount in the hymn, or see the gay troop come
With the first dawn of day, brushing the dew
From the unpolluted fields, and wake to song
The slumbering birds; strong in their innocence!
I did not envy any goddess of all
The Olympian company her votaries.
Ah, happy days of old which now are gone!
A memory and a dream! for now on earth

I rule no longer o'er young willing hearts
In voluntary fealty, which should cease
When Love, with fiery accents calling, woke
The slumbering soul; as now he should for those
Who kneel before the purer, sadder shrine
Which has replaced my own. But ah! too oft,
Not always, but too often, shut from life
Within pale life-long cloisters and the bars
Of deadly convent prisons, year by year
Age after age, the white souls fade and pine
Who simulate the joyous service free
Of those young worshippers. I would that I
Might loose the captives' chains; or Herakles,
Who was a mortal once."

But he who stood
Colossal at my side:
"I toil no more
On earth, nor wield again the mighty strength
Which Zeus once gave me for the cure of ill.
I have run my race; I have done my work; I rest
For ever from the toilsome days I gave
To the suffering race of men. And yet, indeed,
Methinks they suffer still. Tyrannous growths
And monstrous vex them still. Pestilence comes
And sweeps them down. Treacheries come, and wars,
And slay them still. Vaulting ambition leaps
And falls in bloodshed still. But I am here
At rest, and no man kneels to me, or keeps

Reverence for strength mighty yet unabused—
Strength which is Power, God's choicest gift, more rare
And precious than all Beauty, or the charm
Of Wisdom, since it is the instrument
Thro' which all Nature works. For now the earth
Is full of meekness, and a new God rules,
Teaching strange precepts of humility
And mercy and forgiveness. Yet I trow
There is no lack of bloodshed and deceit
And groanings, and the tyrant works his wrong
Even as of old; but now there is no arm
Like mine, made strong by Zeus, to beat him down,
Him and his wrong together. Yet I know
I am not all discrowned. The strong brave souls,
The manly tender hearts, whom tale of wrong
To woman or child, to all weak things and small,
Fires like a blow; calling the righteous flush
Of anger to the brow; knotting the cords

Of muscle on the arm; with one desire
To hew the spoiler down, and make an end,
And go their way for others; making light
Of toil and pain, and too laborious days,
And peril; beat unchanged, albeit they serve
A Lord of meekness. For the world still needs
Its champion as of old, and finds him still.
Not always now with mighty sinews and thews
Like mine, though still these profit, but keen brain
And voice to move men's souls to love the right
And hate the wrong, even tho' the bodily form
Be weak, of giant strength, strong to assail
The hydra heads of Evil, and to slay
The monsters that now waste them—Ignorance,
Self-seeking, coward fears, the hate of man,
Disguised as love of God. These there are still
With task as hard as mine. For what was it
To strive with bodily ills, and do great deeds

Of daring and of strength, and bear the crown,
To his who wages lifelong, doubtful strife
With an impalpable foe; conquering indeed,
But, ere he hears the pæan or sees the pomp,
Laid low in the arms of Death? And tho' men cease
To worship at my shrine, yet not the less
I hold, it was the toils I knew, the pains
I bore for others, which have kept the heart
Of manhood undefiled, and nerved the arm
Of sacrifice, and made the martyr strong
To do and bear, and taught the race of men
How godlike 'tis to suffer thro' life, and die
At last for others' good!"
The strong god ceased,
And stood a little, musing; blest indeed,
But bearing, as it seemed, some faintest trace
Of earthly struggle still, not the gay ease
Of the older heaven-born gods.

And then there came
Beauty and Joy in one, bearing the form
Of woman. How to reach with halting words
That infinite perfection? All have known
The breathing marbles which the Greek has left
Who saw her near, and strove to fix her charms,
And exquisitely failed, or those fair forms
The Painter offered at a later shrine,
And failed. Nay, what are words—he knows it well
Who loves, or who has loved.

She with a smile
Playing around her rosy lips as plays
The sunbeam on a stream:
"Shall I complain
Men kneel to me no longer, taking to them
Some graver, sterner worship; grown too wise
For fleeting joys of Love? Nay, Love is youth,
And still the world is young. Still shall I reign
Within the hearts of men, while Time shall last
And Life renews itself. All Life that is,
From the weak things of earth or sea or air,
Which creep or float for an hour, to godlike man—
All know me and are mine. I am the source
And mother of all, both gods and men; the spring
Of Force and Joy, which, penetrating all
Within the hidden depths of the Unknown,
Sets the blind seed of Being, and from the bond
Of incomplete and dual Essences

Evolves the harmony which is Life. The world
Were dead without my rays, who am the Light
Which vivifies the world. Nay, but for me,
The universal order which attracts
Sphere unto sphere, and keeps them in their paths
For ever, were no more. All things are bound
Within my golden chains, whose name is Love.

And if there be, indeed, some sterner souls
Or sunk in too much learning, or hedged round
By care and greed, or haply too much rapt
By pale ascetic fervours, to delight
To kneel to me, the universal voice
Scorns them as those who, missing willingly
The good that Nature offers, dwell unblest
Who might be blest, but would not. Every voice
Of bard in every age has hymned me. All
The breathing marbles, all the heavenly hues

Of painting, praise me. Even the loveless shades
Of dim monastic cloisters show some gleam,
Tho' faint, of me. Amid the busy throngs
Of cities reign I, and o'er lonely plains,
Beyond the ice-fields of the frozen North,
And the warm waves of undiscovered seas.

For I was born out of the sparkling foam
Which lights the crest of the blue mystic wave,
Stirred by the wandering breath of Life's pure dawn
From a young soul's calm depths. There, without voice,
Stretched on the breathing curve of a young breast,
Fluttering a little, fresh from the great deep
Of life, and creamy as the opening rose,
Naked I lie, naked yet unashamed,
While youth's warm tide steals round me with a kiss,
And floods each limb with fairness. Shame I know not.
Shame is for wrong, and not for innocence—

The veil which Error grasps to hide itself
From the awful Eye. But I, I lie unveiled
And unashamed—the livelong day I lie,
The warm wave murmuring to me; and, all night,
Hidden in the moonlit caves of happy Sleep,
I dream until the morning and am glad.

Why should I seek to clothe myself, and hide
The treasure of my Beauty? Shame may wait
On those for whom 'twas given. The sties of sense
Are none of mine; the brutish, loveless wrong,
The venal charm, the simulated flush
Of fleshly passion, they are none of mine,
Only corruptions of me. Yet I know
The counterfeit the stronger, since gross souls
And brutish sway the earth; and yet I hold
That sense itself is sacred, and I deem
'Twere better to grow soft and sink in sense

Than gloat o'er blood and wrong.

My kingdom is

Over infinite grades of being. All breathing things,

From the least crawling insect to the brute,

From brute to man, confess me. Yet in man

I find my worthiest worship. Where man is,

A youth and a maid, a youth and a maid, nought else

Is wanting for my temple. Every clime

Kneels to me—the long breaker swells and falls

Under the palms, mixed with the merry noise

Of savage bridals, and the straight brown limbs

Know me, and over all the endless plains

I reign, and by the tents on the hot sand

And sea-girt isles am queen, and on the side

Of silent mountains, where the white cots gleam

Upon the green hill pastures, and no sound

But the thunder of the avalanche is borne

To the listening rocks around; and in fair lands

Where all is peace; where thro' the happy hush
Of tranquil summer evenings, 'mid the corn,
Or thro' cool arches of the gadding vines,
The lovers stray together hand in hand,
Hymning my praise; and by the stately streets
Of echoing cities—over all the earth,
Palace and cot, mountain and plain and sea,
The burning South, the icy North, the old
And immemorial East, the unbounded West,
No new god comes to spoil me utterly—
All worship and are mine."

With a sweet smile
Upon her rosy mouth, the goddess ceased;
And when she spoke no more, the silence weighed
As heavy on my soul as when it takes
Some gracious melody, and leaves the ear
Unsatisfied and longing, till the fount
Of sweetness springs again.

But while I stood
Expectant, lo! a fair pale form drew near
With front severe, and wide blue eyes which bore
Mild wisdom in their gaze. Great purity
Shone from her—not the young-eyed innocence
Of her whom first I saw, but that which comes
From wider knowledge, which restrains the tide
Of passionate youth, and leads the musing soul
By the calm deeps of Wisdom. And I knew
My eyes had seen the fair, the virgin Queen,

Who once within her shining Parthenon
Beheld the sages kneel.
She with clear voice
And coldly sweet, yet with a softness too,
As doth befit a virgin:
"She does right
To boast her sway, my sister, seeing indeed
That all things are as by a double law,
And from a double root the tree of Life
Springs up to the face of heaven. Body and Soul,
Matter and Spirit, lower joys of Sense
And higher joys of Thought, I know that both
Build up the shrine of Being, The brute sense
Leaves man a brute; but, winged with soaring thought,
Mounts to high heaven. The unembodied spirit,
Dwelling alone, unmated, void of sense,
Is impotent. And yet I hold there is,
Far off, but not too far for mortal reach,

A calmer height, where, nearer to the stars,
Thought sits alone and gazes with rapt gaze—
A large-eyed maiden in a robe of white,
Who brings the light of Knowledge down, and draws
To her pontifical eyes a bridge of gold,
Which spans the earth and heaven.
For what were life,
If things of sense were all, for those large souls
And high, which grudging Nature has shut fast
Within unlovely forms, or those from whom
The circuit of the rapid gliding years
Steals the brief gift of beauty? Shall we hold,
With idle singers, all the treasure of hope
Is lost with youth—swift-fleeting, treacherous youth,
Which fades and flies before the ripening brain
Crowns life with Wisdom's crown? Nay, even in youth,
Is it not more to walk upon the heights
Alone, the cold free heights, and mark the vale

Lie breathless in the glare, or hidden and blurred
By cloud and storm, or pestilence and war
Creep on with blood and death, while the soul dwells
Apart upon the heights, outfronts the sun
As the eagle does, and takes the coming dawn
While all the vale is dark, and knows the springs
Of tiny runlets hurrying from the snows,
Which soon shall swell to vast and rolling streams,
And feed the oceans which divide the world?

Oh, ecstasy! oh, wonder! oh, delight!
Which neither the slow, withering touch of Time,
Which takes all else—the smooth and rounded cheek
Of youth; the lightsome step; the warm young heart
Which beats for love or friend; the treasure of hope
Immeasurable; the quick-coursing blood
Which makes it joy to be,—ay, takes them all
And leaves us naught—nor yet satiety

Born of too full possession, takes or mars !
Oh, fair delight of learning ! which grows great
And stronger and more keen, for slower limbs,
And dimmer eyes and loneliness, and loss
Of lower good—wealth, friendship, ay, and Love—
When the swift soul, turning its weary gaze
From the old vanished joys, projects itself
Into the void and floats in empty space,
Striving to mark the mystic source of Things,
The secrets of the earth and sea and air,
The Law that holds the process of the suns,
The awful depths of Mind and Thought ; the prime
Unfathomable mystery of God !

Is there, then, any who holds my worship cold
And lifeless? Nay, but 'tis the light which cheers
The waning life ! Love thou thy love, brave youth !
Cleave to thy love, fair maid ! it is the Law

Which dominates the world, that bids ye use
Your nature; but, when now the ebbing tide
Slackens a little, turn your calmer eyes
To the fair page of Knowledge. It is power
I give, and power is precious. It is strength
To live four-square, careless of outward shows,
And self-sufficing. It is clearer sight
To know the rule of life, the Eternal scheme;
And, knowing it, to do and not to err,
And, doing, to be blest."

The calm voice rose
Higher and higher to the close; the cold
Clear accents, fired as by a hidden fire,
Glowed into life and tenderness, and throbbed
As with some spiritual ecstasy
Sweeter than that of Love.

But as they died,
I heard an ampler voice; and looking, marked
A fair and gracious form. She seemed a Queen
Who ruled o'er gods and men, the majesty
Of perfect womanhood. No youthful bud
Of beauty, but the full consummate flower
Was hers; and from her mild large eyes looked forth
Gentle command, and motherhood, and home,
And pure affection. Awe and reverence
O'erspread me, as I knew my eyes had looked
On sovereign Heré, mother of the gods.

She, with clear, rounded utterance, sweet and calm:
"I know Love's fruit is good and fair to see

And taste, if any gain it, and I know
How brief Life's Passion-tide, which when it ends
May change to thirst for Knowledge, and I know
How fair the realm of Mind, wherein the soul
Thirsting to know, wings its impetuous way
Beyond the bounds of Thought; and yet I hold
There is a higher bliss than these, which fits
A mortal life, compact of Body and Soul,
And therefore double-natured—a calm path
Which lies before the feet, thro' common ways
And undistinguished crowds of toiling men,
And yet is hard to tread, tho' seeming smooth,
And yet, tho' level, earns a worthier crown.

For Knowledge is a steep which few may climb,
While Duty is a path which all may tread.
And if the Soul of Life and Thought be this,
How best to speed the mighty scheme, which still

Fares onward day by day—the Life of the World
Which is the sum of petty lives, which live
And die so this may live—how then shall each
Of that great multitude of faithful souls
Who walk not on the heights, fulfil himself,
But by the duteous Life which looks not forth
Beyond its narrow sphere, and finds its work,
And works it out; content, this done, to fall
And perish, if Fate will, so the great scheme
Goes onward?

Wherefore am I, Queen in Heaven
And Earth, whose realm is Duty, bearing rule
More constant and more wide than those whose words
Thou heardest last. Mine are the striving souls
Of fathers toiling day by day obscure
And unrewarded, save by their own hearts,
'Mid wranglings of the Forum or the mart;
Who long for joys of Thought, and yet must toil

Unmurmuring thro' dull lives from youth to age;
Who haply might have worn instead the crown
Of Honour and of Fame: mine the fair mothers
Who, for the love of children and of home,
When passion dies, expend their toilful days
In loving labour sweetened by the sense
Of Duty: mine the statesman who toils on
Thro' vigilant nights and days, guiding his State,
Yet finds no gratitude; and those white souls
Who spend themselves for others all their days
In trivial tasks of Pity. The fine growths
Of Man and Time are mine, and spend themselves
For me and for the mystical End which lies
Beyond their gaze and mine, and yet is good,
Tho' hidden from men and gods.

For as the flower
Of the tiger-lily bright with varied hues
Is for a day, then fades and leaves behind

Fairness nor fruit, while the green tiny tuft
Swells to the purple of the clustering grape
Or golden waves of wheat, so lives of men
Which show most splendid fade and are deceased
And leave no trace; while those, unmarked, unseen,
Which no man wots of, rear the stately tree
Of Knowledge, not for itself sought out, but found
In the dusty ways of life—a fairer growth
Than springs in cloistered shades; and from the sum
Of Duty, blooms sweeter and more divine
The fair ideal of the Race, than comes
From glittering gains of Learning.

Life, full life,
Full-flowered, full-fruited, reared from homely earth,
Rooted in duty, and thro' long calm years
Bearing its load of healthful energies;
Stretching its arms on all sides; fed with dews
Of cheerful sacrifice, and clouds of care,

And rain of useful tears; warmed by the sun
Of calm affection, till it breathes itself
In perfume to the heavens—this is the prize
I hold most dear, more precious than the fruit
Of Knowledge or of Love."

The goddess ceased
As dies some gracious harmony, the child
Of wedded themes which single and alone
Were discords, but united breathe a sound
Sweet as the sounds of heaven.

And then stood forth
The last of the gods I saw, the first in rank
And dignity and beauty, the young god
Who grows not old, the Light of Heaven and Earth,
Who worketh from afar, who sends the fire
Of inspiration to the bard and bathes
The world in hues of heaven—the golden link
Between High God and Man.
With a sweet voice
Whose every note was sweetest melody—
The melody has fled, the words remain—
Apollo sang :

"I know how fair the face
Of Purity; I know the treasure of Strength;
I know the charm of Love, the calmer grace
Of Wisdom and of Duteous well-spent lives:
And yet there is a loftier height than these.

There is a Height higher than mortal thought;
There is a Love warmer than mortal love;
There is a Life which taketh not its hues
From Earth or earthly things, and so grows pure
And higher than the petty cares of men,
And is a blessed life and glorified.

Oh, white young souls, strain upward, upward still,
Even to the heavenly source of Purity!
Brave hearts, bear on and suffer! Strike for right,
Strong arms, and hew down wrong! The world hath need
Of all of you—the sensual, wrongful world!

Hath need of you, and of thée too, fair Love.
Oh, lovers, cling together! the old world
Is full of Hate. Sweeten it; draw in one
Two separate chords of Life; and from the bond
Of twin souls lost in Harmony create
A Fair God dwelling with you—Love, the Lord!

Waft yourselves, yearning souls, upon the stars;
Sow yourselves on the wandering winds of space;
Watch patient all your days, if your eyes take
Some dim, cold fire of Knowledge. The dull world
Hath need of you—the purblind, slothful world!

Live on, brave lives, chained to the narrow round
Of Duty; live, expend yourselves, and make
The orb of Being wheel onward steadfastly
Upon its path—the Lord of Life alone

Knows to what goal of Good; work on, live on:
And yet there is a higher work than yours.

To have looked upon the face of the Unknown
And Perfect Beauty. To have heard the voice
Of Godhead in the winds and in the seas.
To have known Him in the circling of the suns,
And in the changeful fates and lives of men.

To be fulfilled of Godhead as a cup
Filled with a precious essence, till the hand
On marble or on canvas falling, leaves
Celestial traces, or from reed or string
Draws out faint echoes of the voice Divine
That bring God nearer to a faithless world.

Or, higher still and fairer and more blest,
To be His seer, His prophet; to be the voice

Of the Ineffable Word; to be the glass
Of the Ineffable Light, and bring them down
To bless the earth, set in a shrine of Song.

For Knowledge is a barren tree and bare
Bereft of God, and Duty but a word,.
And Strength but Tyranny, and Love, Desire,
And Purity a folly; and the Soul,
Which brings down God to Man, the Light to the world—
He is the Maker, and is blest, is blest!"
He ended, and I felt my soul grow faint
With too much sweetness.
In a mist of grace
They faded, that bright company, and seemed
To melt into each other and shape themselves
Into new forms, and those fair goddesses
Blent in a perfect woman—all the calm
High motherhood of Heré, the sweet smile

Of Cypris, fair Athenê's earnest eyes,
And the young purity of Artemis,
Blent in a perfect woman; and in her arms,
Fused by some cosmic interlacing curves
Of Beauty into a new Innocence,
A child with eyes divine, a little child,
A little child—no more.
And those great gods
Of Power and Beauty left a heavenly form
Strong not to act, but suffer; fair and meek,
Not proud and eager; with soft eyes of grace,
Not bold with joyous youth; and for the fire
Of song, and for the happy careless life,
A sorrowful pilgrimage—changed, yet the same;
Only Diviner far; and keeping still
The Life God-lighted and the sacrifice.

And when these faded wholly, at my side,

Tho' hidden before by those too-radiant forms,
I was aware once more of her, my guide
Psyche, who had not left me, floating near
On golden wings; and all the plains of heaven
Were left to us, me and my soul alone.

Then when my life revived again, I said
Whispering, "But Zeus I saw not, the prime Source
And Sire of all the gods."
And she bent low
With downcast eyes. "Nay. Thou hast seen of Him
All that thine eyes can bear, in those fair forms
Which are but parts of Him and are indeed
Attributes of the Substance which supports
The Universe of Things—the Soul of the World,
The Stream which flows Eternal, from no Source
Into no Sea. His Purity, His Strength,
His Love, His Knowledge, His unchanging rule

Of Duty, thou hast seen, only a part
And not the whole, being a finite mind
Too weak for infinite thought; nor, couldst thou see
All of Him visible to mortal sight,
Wouldst thou see all His essence, since the gods—
Glorified essences of Human mould,
Who are but Zeus made visible to men—
See Him not wholly, only some thin edge
And halo of His glory; nor know they
What vast and unsuspected Universes
Lie beyond thought, where yet He rules, like those
Vast Suns we cannot see, round which our Sun
Moves with his system, or those darker still
Which not even thus we know, but yet exist
Tho' no eye marks, nor thought itself, and lurk
In the awful Depths of Space; or that which is
Not orbed as yet, but indiscrete, confused,
Sown thro' the void—the faintest gleam of light

Which sets itself to Be. And yet is He
There too, and rules, none seeing. But sometimes
To this our heaven, which is so like to earth
But nearer to Him, for awhile He shows
Some gleam of His own brightness, and methinks
It cometh soon; but thou, if thou shouldst gaze,
Thy Life will rush to His—the tiny spark
Absorbed in that full blaze—and what there is
Of mortal fall from thee."

But I: "Oh, soul,
What holdeth Life more precious than to know
The Giver and to die?"

Then she: "Behold!
Look upward and adore."

And with the word,
Unhasting, undelaying, gradual, sure,
The floating cloud which clothed the hidden peak
Rose slow in awful silence, laying bare

Spire after rocky spire, snow after snow,
Whiter and yet more dreadful, till at last
It left the summit clear.
Then with a bound,
In the twinkling of an eye, in the flash of a thought,
I knew an Awful Effluence of Light,
Formless, Ineffable, Perfect, burst on me
And flood my being round, and take my life
Into itself. I saw my guide bent down
Prostrate, her wings before her face; and then
No more.

But when I woke from my long trance
Behold, it was no longer Tartarus,
Nor Hades, nor Olympus, but the bare
And unideal aspect of the fields

Which Spring not yet had kissed—the strange old Earth
So far more fabulous now than in the days
When Man was young, nor yet the mystery
Of human life transformed it. From the hills
The long night fled at last; the unclouded sun,
The dear, fair sun, leapt downward swift, and smote
My sight with rays of gold, and pierced my brain
With too much light ere my entrancëd eyes
Could hide themselves.

And I was on the Earth
Dreaming the dream of Life again, as late
I dreamed the dream of Death.

Another day
Dawned on the race of men; another world—
New heavens, and new earth.

And as I went
Across the lightening fields, upon a bank
I saw a single snowdrop glance, and bring
Promise of spring; and keeping my old thought
In the old fair Hellenic vesture dressed,
I felt myself a ghost, and seemed to be
Now fair Adonis hasting to the arms
Of his lost love—now sad Persephone
Restored to mother earth—or that high shade
Orpheus, who gave up heaven to save his love,
And is rewarded—or young Marsyas,
Who spent his youth and life for song, and yet
Was happy though in torture—or the fair
And dreaming youth I saw, who still awaits,

Hopeful, the unveiling heaven, when he shall see
His fair ideal love. The birds sang blithe;
There came a tinkling from the waking fold;
And on the hillside from the cot a girl
Tripped singing with her pitcher. All the sounds
And thoughts which still are beautiful—Youth, Song,
Dawn, Spring, Renewal—and my soul was glad
Of all the freshness, and I felt again
The youth and spring-tide of the world, and thought,
Which feigned those fair and gracious fantasies.

For every dawn that breaks brings a new world,
And every budding bosom a new life.
These fair tales, which we know so beautiful,
Show only finer than our lives to-day
Because their voice was clearer, and they found
A sacred bard to sing them. We are pent,
Who sing to-day, by all the garnered wealth

Of ages of past song. We have no more
The world to choose from, who, where'er we turn,
Tread through old thoughts and fair. Yet must we sing—
We have no choice; and if more hard the toil
In noon, when all is clear, than in the fresh
White mists of early morn, yet do we find
Achievement its own guerdon, and at last
The rounder song of manhood grows more sweet
Than the high note of youth.

For, Youth and Age—
Nought else divides us from the fresh young days
Which men call ancient, seeing that we in turn
Shall one day be Time's ancients, and inspire
The wiser, higher race, which yet shall sing
Because to sing is human, and high thought
Grows rhythmic ere its close. Nought else there is
But that weird beat of Time, which doth disjoin
Hellas and England.

How should any hold
Those precious scriptures only old-world tales
Of strange impossible torments and false gods;
Of men and monsters in some brainless dream,
Coherent, yet unmeaning, linked together
By some false skein of song?
For, evermore,
All things and thoughts, both new and old, are writ
Upon the unchanging human heart and soul.
Has Passion still no prisoners? Pine there now
No lives which fierce Love, sinking into Lust,
Has drowned at last in tears and blood—plunged down
To the lowest depths of Hell? Have not strong Will
And high Ambition rotted into Greed
And Wrong, for any, as of old, and whelmed
The struggling soul in ruin? Hell lies near
Around us as does Heaven, and in the World,
Which is our Hades, still the chequered souls

Compact of good and ill—not all accurst
Nor altogether blest—a few brief years
Travel the little journey of their lives,
They know not to what end. The weary woman
Sunk deep in ease and sated with her life,
Much loved and yet unloving, pines to-day
As Helen; still the poet strives and sings,
And hears Apollo's music, and grows dumb,
And suffers, yet is happy; still the young
Fond dreamer seeks his high ideal love,
And finds her name is Death; still doth the fair
And innocent life, bound naked to the rock,
Redeem the race; still the gay tempter goes
And leaves his victim, stone; still doth pain bind
Men's souls in closer links of lovingness,
Than Death itself can sever; still the sight
Of too great beauty blinds us, and we lose
The sense of earthly splendours, gaining heaven.

And still the heavens lie open as of old
To the entrancëd gaze, ay, nearer far
And brighter than of yore; and Might is there,
And Infinite Purity is there, and high
Eternal Wisdom, and the calm clear face
Of Duty, and a higher, stronger Love
And Light in one, and a new, reverend Name,
Greater than any and combining all;
And over all, veiled with a veil of cloud,
God set far off, too bright for mortal eyes.

And always, always, with each soul that comes
And goes, comes that fair form who was my guide,
Hovering, with golden wings and eyes divine,
Above the bed of birth, the bed of death,
Still breathing heavenly airs of deathless love.

For while a youth is lost in soaring thought,
And while a maid grows sweet and beautiful,
And while a spring-tide coming lights the earth,
And while a child, and while a flower is born,
And while one wrong cries for redress and finds
A soul to answer, still the world is young!

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